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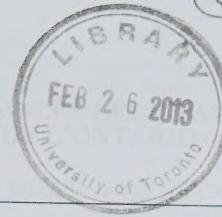
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Government
Publications

No. 1



Nº 1

ISSN 1180-2987

Legislative Assembly of Ontario

Second Session, 40th Parliament

Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

Deuxième session, 40^e législature

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Tuesday 19 February 2013

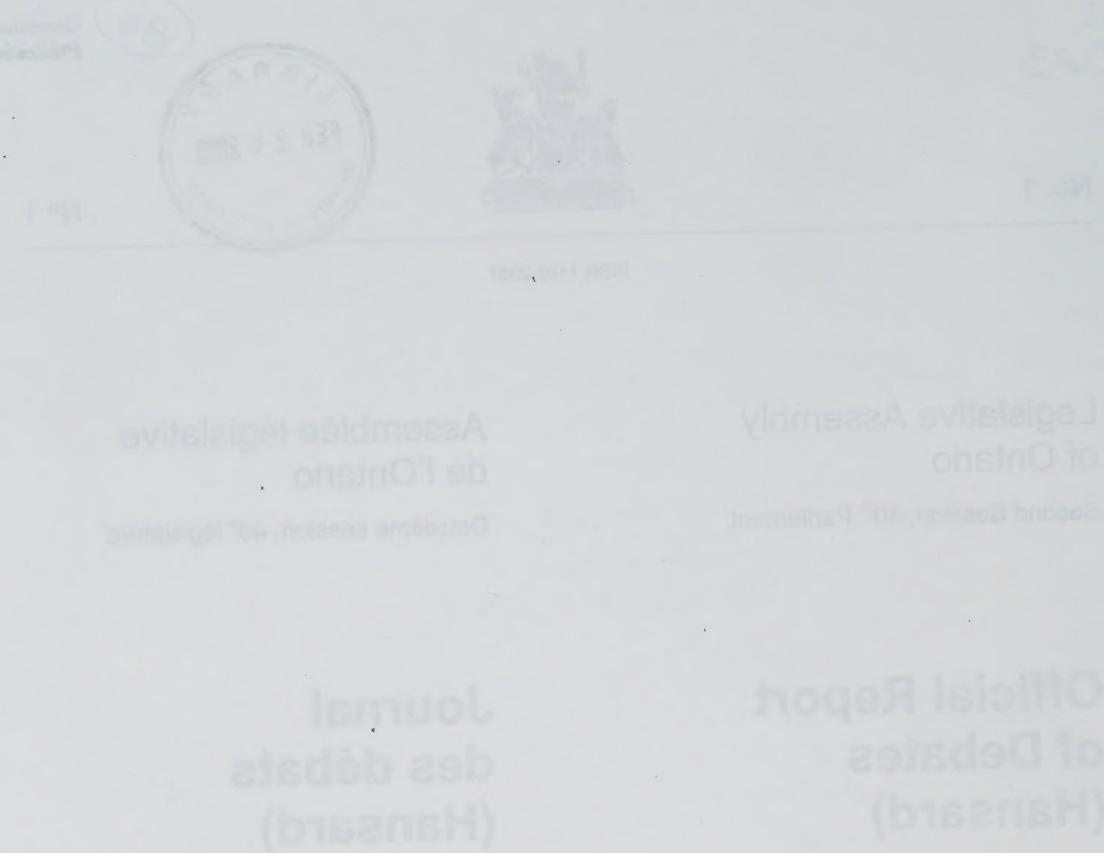
Mardi 19 février 2013

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Greffière
Deborah Deller



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Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Service du Journal des débats et d'interprétation
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 19 February 2013

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 19 février 2013

The first day of the second session of the 40th Parliament of the province of Ontario commenced at 1500 pursuant to a proclamation of the Honourable David C. Onley, Lieutenant Governor of the province.

His Honour the Lieutenant Governor was pleased to open the session by reading the speech from the throne.

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE DISCOURS DU TRÔNE

Hon. David C. Onley (Lieutenant Governor): Mr. Speaker, members of the Legislative Assembly, men and women, young and old, across this great province of Ontario.

I would like to acknowledge that we are on the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of the New Credit.

Today it is my privilege as Her Majesty's representative to deliver the first speech from the throne drafted by this new government, as we mark the beginning of the second session of the 40th Parliament of Ontario.

Aujourd'hui, à titre de représentant de Sa Majesté, j'ai le privilège de prononcer le premier discours du trône de ce nouveau gouvernement à l'occasion de l'ouverture de la deuxième session de la 40^e législature de l'Ontario.

If you will allow me a moment of reflection, I would like to speak of another first, a man whom, sadly, we have lost since I last addressed this Legislature.

The Honourable Lincoln Alexander was the first black member of Parliament, the first black cabinet minister, the first black Lieutenant Governor of Ontario.

But when he passed away last October, his granddaughters remembered him simply as a true human being with flaws and perfections.

He was born and raised in Toronto, his heart belonged to Hamilton, but he served on behalf of his entire province, and his nation.

He was not hemmed in by the prejudice of others, nor the expectations of his time.

He demonstrated that every individual part of our being informs who we are but it does not define who we are.

And that if we believe in our own abilities, our potential has no limits.

As a man, he was more than the sum of his parts and now, as a memory, he is a symbol of the service we must endeavour to offer.

Your new government believes that Ontario is a place of endless possibilities.

Of flaws and perfections.

Where people have different backgrounds and different views, where they gaze upon different skylines, but share the same hopes.

Your new government sees a great province that brings together disparate elements and bonds them together as one.

And your new government believes the Legislature should work the same way.

For the benefit of the entire province, your government intends to work with opposition parties, in a spirit of renewed co-operation, to get the people's business done.

It does not believe that we are irreparably divided.

Il ne croit pas que nous soyons définitivement divisés.
Or that the challenges we face cannot be overcome.

Nor will it look at any one issue in isolation from another, because your new government believes that complex times require thoughtful, collaborative solutions.

And that we can only surmount each obstacle by acknowledging that they are all connected.

And that we are all connected.

So yes, your government will balance its books—it will also challenge the people of Ontario to help the province innovate and grow.

And yes, your government will strive for economic prosperity—it will also encourage a fair society, where all the people of Ontario have good jobs and strong communities.

And where each and every one of us is safe, and healthy and cared for.

Your government will create a better process to ensure that all its partners, including those within the public sector, are treated with respect.

But it will call upon these same partners to work with this new government so we can journey forward, boldly, as one.

Today, we turn a page in history, in some respects.

Another series of firsts: the first day of a reopened Legislature, the first female Premier.

We are not starting over, but we are dedicated anew.

Nous ne recommençons pas à zéro, mais nous poursuivons sur une nouvelle lancée.

The central objectives of your new government will be fiscal responsibility, economic growth and increased employment—the bedrocks on which it will build.

It will ensure opportunity for all without letting anyone slip through the cracks.

And it will send a clear message that Ontario's finances are in steady hands, so that the confidence of all sectors can be raised.

Your new government will restrain program spending to reduce Ontario's debt-to-GDP ratio, while recommitting itself to eliminating the deficit by 2017-18.

And after that, it will restrict overall spending increases to 1% below GDP growth until the province's debt-to-GDP ratio returns to the pre-recession level of 27%.

It will also introduce a balanced approach to balancing the budget so that all parties can work together to find savings without impacting the services on which people rely.

However, your new government understands that Ontario's true potential cannot be reached through austerity alone.

And so it will continue to implement recommendations found in the Drummond report, including work to evaluate corporate tax compliance.

But it will also be driven by the quest for innovation and growth.

Mais il sera également guidé par la recherche de l'innovation et de la croissance.

At the heart of this will be your new government's action on job creation, which will draw on the belief that an educated, skilled and diverse workforce is Ontario's greatest strength.

Your government looks to strengthen the earning potential of all men and women of this province—whether they live in cities or small towns, the north or the south—and enable everyone to have a good job and a secure paycheque.

It will empower its industries to expand and its individual citizens to excel.

Your government will coordinate its services with those of non-profit and private sectors so that recent graduates, new Canadians and the unemployed can find a practical path into the workforce.

To address the serious issue of youth unemployment, your government will join forces with high school educators, colleges, universities, training partners and employers to establish opportunities for young people to enhance their skills; find placements, internships and co-op programs; and gain valuable, real world experience.

Aboriginal communities must also have access to the tools and training they need to fully participate in economic development opportunities, including those related to our natural resources.

And so your government is working with aboriginal communities to ensure that the benefits of resource development are shared and opportunities for education, training and employment are established.

Your government will ensure that all individuals can find their role in this economy.

And so it calls on the private sector to increase the number of people with disabilities in the Ontario workforce.

As a demonstration of its commitment to this goal, your government will shift the Accessibility Directorate from the Ministry of Community and Social Services to the Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Employment.

Because men and women with disabilities deserve a level playing field.

A renewed partnership with business, educational institutions, not-for-profits and labour will be at the heart of your government's plans to build a modern, competitive and dynamic economy.

And so your new government will work with the opposition and small business to explore an increase in the employer health tax exemption threshold.

It will look to stimulate productivity across all sectors, from automotive and agriculture to film, music, and digital media; from small business to start-ups and social entrepreneurs.

And your government will continue to assert Ontario's pride of place in the realms of manufacturing, financial services, tourism, forestry and natural resource development.

1510

But it will also support the exploration of new economic terrain.

It will work with financial institutions and government agencies to ensure that small- and medium-sized enterprises have access to the capital they need to expand.

And as a demonstration of that commitment, your government will contribute \$50 million to a new \$300-million venture capital fund in partnership with its federal counterparts and the private sector.

Your government will also capitalize on its trade corridors, expanding them and making them attractive to global markets.

It will work with members of our diverse population to open up new opportunities and expand the network of our possibilities.

It will help facilitate the smooth transfer of goods through important hubs like Windsor, across the Detroit River international crossing, and it will lead trade missions to our valuable partners abroad.

Your government will visit our friends in India and China, but also in Southeast Asia, eastern Europe, the Middle East and South America.

It will ensure that every part of the province has dependable, affordable sources of energy.

And because conservation is the cheapest source of energy available, Ontario will continue to be a leader in smart-grid technology and energy conservation, and see the creation of new-economy jobs through the deployment of leading energy efficiency technologies in our homes and in our businesses.

It will also continue its work to end coal-fired energy generation, the single-largest climate change initiative currently under way in North America.

As your government moves forward, Ontario's labour force will be treated fairly and with respect.

It will sit down with its partners across all sectors to build a sustainable model for wage negotiation, respectful of both collective bargaining and a fair and transparent interest arbitration process, so that the brightness of our shared future is not clouded by the indisputable economic realities of our time.

It will prove once again that Ontario is a great place to work and live, but also to visit, to invest in, to believe in.

It will celebrate our hard work, our ingenuity, our diversity, our arts and culture, and protect the beauty of our natural environment.

And it calls upon its legislative partners to join with the government in the pursuit of a modern economy, a path to productivity, and good jobs right here in Ontario.

Because the tools of progress must be forged in the fire of our collective will.

Your government understands the importance of relationships in all their manifestations.

The relationship between us as citizens; but also the relationship between individual parts and the whole.

The ways in which our economy is supported by the roads we drive, and the services we continue to offer.

Your government understands that if Ontario is to prosper, then individual communities must prosper.

Votre gouvernement comprend que pour que l'Ontario prospère, les collectivités doivent prospérer elles aussi.

And that provinces must work together to advocate for their shared needs, and raise their voices as one to demand that a great nation must have the capacity to do great things.

Your government understands that infrastructure is the underpinning of our economy, and that if we continue to lag behind then we will never leap forward.

The people of this province are ready to have a serious conversation about the needs of their communities, whether those needs are better roads or stronger bridges, repaired underpasses or accelerated, integrated transit planning.

To build these things and facilitate Ontario's success, your government believes that smart infrastructure investment can no longer be mired in political rhetoric.

Just as the hard-working men and women of this province can no longer afford to waste their time stuck in traffic.

Or be isolated from one another, and the services they need, because their communities are remote, or their funding is unpredictable.

If we continue to argue about the tools this investment will require then we are deaf to the symphony of progress that echoes around us.

The new government is confident that the people of Ontario are willing to participate in a practical discussion of these costs if they can be guaranteed measurable results.

And those results will be found in the increase of our collective productivity, the reduction of our daily commute times and the reduced impact on our climate and natural environment.

But your government also realizes that these are not the hurdles of one city or one province, but a race against time for Canada as a whole.

Addressing them will require co-operation from all orders of government, and so your government will engage in conversation with its municipal and community partners.

And it will also reach out to its provincial and territorial colleagues to advocate for a national strategy on infrastructure and transit.

It will address the need for improvements to rural roads and bridges, suburban transit, and a solution to the gridlock that threatens to cripple the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area.

It will address the special transportation needs of Ontario's north and endeavour to improve vital access to the Ring of Fire, and improve the flow of people and goods along our trade corridors to the United States.

Because Ontario cannot evolve if it cannot move.

Your government intends to work with municipalities on other issues, too.

Because communities must be involved and connected to one another.

Car les collectivités doivent être parties prenantes et reliées entre elles.

They must have a voice in their future and a say in their integrated, regional development.

So that local populations are involved from the beginning if there is going to be a gas plant or a casino or a wind plant or a quarry in their hometown.

Because our economy can benefit from these things, but only if we have willing hosts.

Ontario communities must also remain safe.

Because every child in this province should be able to walk home without fear, and no parent should face an unthinkable loss.

And so your government will explore how to improve collaboration along the front lines of community safety, allowing police and prosecutors to build on successful best practices across the justice system.

When it comes to the different regions of this province, your new government will not address your issues in isolation because you are not isolated.

Your new government will work with municipal leaders in every region of this province.

Because our rural and northern residents are unique, and their voices will be heard.

But that same promise is made to young families in condos downtown, to retirees in Ontario's wine country, to the people of the north and the south and the east and the west.

Because your government knows that its citizens are not defined by their location alone.

Because we have auto workers who live on rural roads, and we have local food advocates who cycle to work in the city.

We have authors and artists and actors in Timmins and men and women who love the outdoors but live in the growing city of London.

We are all extensions of the same landscape, part of the same province, and each citizen will inform its government's perspective and its actions.

Your government knows that Ontario comprises many parts and is one part of the Canadian whole.

And that while we are all different, we share the same goals.

To climb to great heights, your government believes that everyone must have the same firm footing.

If we help people now, we will help ourselves immeasurably in the future, because the services provided by your government allow people to work and prosper and contribute.

Following the recommendations of Frances Lankin and Munir Sheikh, your new government will work to help the unemployed find a job.

And to ensure that the challenging path they must navigate to free themselves from social assistance is not made unduly difficult, your government will enable them to keep more of what they earn through their hard work.

These are people whom all parties hope to empower, and your government encourages the Legislature to work together on their behalf.

Your government will also ensure that our citizens have a safe, secure and affordable place to live.

The day-to-day interests of people across Ontario must be addressed, and your government will strive to protect their privacy and their pocketbooks.

It will help this province's nine million drivers by continuing to implement the recommendations of the Auto Insurance Anti-Fraud Task Force, protecting individuals against fraud and working to reduce insurance rates across Ontario.

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And it will look to strengthen the rights of Ontario's consumers when it comes to door-to-door sales, debt settlement services, real estate transactions and mobile and smart phone contracts.

Because our marketplace must be fair, and the prices we pay transparent.

The happiness and health of Ontario residents must be enshrined, and so your government will also continue to build the strongest and most innovative health care system in the world, so that the hospitals and research institutions in places like Thunder Bay and Toronto keep setting international standards and saving innumerable lives.

Your government is committed to health promotion to combat smoking and obesity, and it believes strongly in patient-centred care and evidence-based health policy.

Along with all parties in the Legislature, it understands the pressing need to expand access to home care in Ontario.

And so your government will continue to expand the support available to people in their homes, and to address the needs of men and women across Ontario currently waiting for the home care services they require.

Your government will also continue to expand access to mental health services and support efforts to reduce stigma for men and women coping with mental illness.

It will work with partners in all related sectors to coordinate the best response to these challenges because Ontario's minds and spirits must be healthy, too.

It will also move forward with a Seniors Strategy to ensure that Ontario can best respond to the needs of its aging population.

It will promote partnership between health care providers—from hospitals and long-term-care homes, to community support services and front-line medical providers through community health links—so that the care of our loved ones and our most vulnerable citizens is constant and cohesive.

To ensure the best treatment for our children, our parents, grandparents and our friends, your government believes the research community must be supported in its work.

And it is therefore announcing renewed support for the Ontario Brain Institute through a funding partnership with the private sector.

Every dollar your government contributes will leverage four additional dollars from its partners by 2018.

A healthy community also requires strong doses of compassion and forethought.

And so your government will continue to prioritize education and inclusion.

It will keep building a comprehensive early learning and care system, including the successful extension of full-day kindergarten and child care.

It will show its respect for teachers, support staff, principals and school boards.

Because our young people will experience a world of which we can now only dream, and we must all work together to ensure they are equipped with the appropriate tools for their time.

They must be literate in the languages of tomorrow; encouraged to pursue the paths of their choosing and prepared for the challenges ahead.

We must teach them to work together and to believe in themselves.

Nous devons leur enseigner à travailler ensemble et à croire en eux.

We must emphasize critical thinking, creativity, teamwork and an entrepreneurial spirit.

We must enamour them to the possibilities of science, math and technology.

We must help them feel safe and take their ideas and their input seriously.

And so your government will create a permanent Premier's Youth Advisory Council.

It will continue to offer the 30% Off Ontario Tuition Grant to help more people get a post-secondary education.

And your government believes that First Nation, Métis and Inuit children must share in every opportunity, too.

That we must close the gap with their peers so that they can live and learn and play as they like.

And we must all acknowledge that their proud heritage does not preclude their full participation.

Your government will work with aboriginal communities, but the federal government must also live up to its important obligations in this regard.

Your government will ensure that attention and respect are extended to all.

Votre gouvernement veillera aussi à ce que la culture et les contributions de notre communauté francophone soient reconnues et célébrées.

C'est pourquoi il élargira la disponibilité des programmes d'études au palier postsecondaire dans le centre-sud-ouest de l'Ontario.

It will ensure that Ontario's francophone community is recognized and celebrated for its culture and its contributions.

And so your government will expand the availability of French post-secondary programs in central and southwestern Ontario.

Our community of new Canadians will be shown that where they were born will not limit what they can achieve.

Ontario is home to citizens who speak many languages; who have brought their culture, their training and their aspirations to this province.

Your government sees Ontario's diverse population as an asset to be exalted.

It is not just a mosaic but a valuable work of art, from which we can glean great knowledge.

The people of this province may speak different languages. They may be young or old, healthy or ailing, rich or poor.

But the parties of this Legislature should have their trust, and they deserve our fairness and our support.

Your government believes that if we can hope to serve Ontario, then we must act together, as one.

The people of Ontario expect this of all members of the Legislative Assembly.

Les habitants de cette province s'attendent à ce que tous les députés de l'Assemblée législative travaillent ensemble.

It is what they want and it is what they deserve.

Members of provincial Parliament must be conduits for their constituents, so that this Legislature can hear all the voices of this province and represent all of its diverse needs.

All parties and each member will be encouraged to contribute to this process, to make their insights known.

Your new government hopes that ideas will be put forward with optimism and purpose, and that voices will not be raised solely for the pursuit or retention of power.

Your government is committed to finding real, creative solutions to the issues we face.

To do this, it will direct its efforts across these aisles, within its ministries, and in partnership with other provinces.

When Ontario hosts the Council of the Federation in Niagara-on-the-Lake this summer, it will work with our

provincial partners to expedite the return of principled transfer arrangements with the federal government.

Closer to home, your government expects the talent and tenacity of its public servants to help propel this province to greatness.

It will not over-promise, nor will it be bowed into submission.

It will be respectful and direct, honest and decisive.

Your government, and your cabinet ministers, will be accountable to all the people of Ontario, and work to prevent mistakes before they occur.

And it will work with all parties in the Legislature to review the decisions to relocate energy infrastructure in this province.

Your new government is committed to getting real work done on behalf of all the people of Ontario, and it calls upon members of the Legislature to come together in support of that noble goal.

There are so many opportunities for progress, for all parties to join together.

There is common ground that transcends partisan politics, and it is found in the desire to make Ontario's economy stronger; to improve its transportation networks and give all the people of this province the same opportunities, purpose and pride.

Your government believes all things are possible.

Your government will not be hemmed in by expectations.

It will explore the endless geography of our shared potential.

Il explorera la géographie infinie de notre potentiel commun.

Because we are one province, and together we can be more than the sum of our parts.

Your government will tackle its flaws and celebrate the perfections of its people.

Your government will bring together disparate elements and bond them together as one.

Both within these hallowed halls and across this glorious province.

Because we are people with different backgrounds and different views, we gaze upon different skylines but we all share the same hopes.

And your government will endeavour to serve for the benefit of all.

Thank you. Merci. Meegwetch.

1530

Singing of O Canada.

His Honour was then pleased to retire.

Prayers.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that to prevent mistakes, I have obtained a copy of the speech from the throne, which I will now read.

Interjection: Dispense.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Agreed? Agreed.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

AN ACT TO PERPETUATE AN ANCIENT PARLIAMENTARY RIGHT LOI VISANT À PERPÉTUER UN ANCIEN DROIT PARLEMENTAIRE

Ms. Wynne moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill 1, An Act to perpetuate an ancient parliamentary right / Projet de loi 1, Loi visant à perpétuer un ancien droit parlementaire.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Premier for a short statement.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Following long-standing tradition, the first bill introduced in the Legislature involves an initiative not mentioned in the speech from the throne. I am pleased to introduce this bill here today. This practice signifies the assembly's independence from the crown and the collect-

ive right of members to address the Legislature's priorities before attending to other business.

MOTIONS

THRONE SPEECH DEBATE

Hon. John Milloy: I move that the speech of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor to this House be taken into consideration on Wednesday, February 20, 2013.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I move adjournment of the House.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

This House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. on Wednesday, February 20, 2013.

The House adjourned at 1537.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneur: Hon. / L'hon. David C. Onley, O.Ont.

Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Dave Levac

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Tonia Grannum, Trevor Day, Anne Stokes

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP)	London–Fanshawe	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Scarborough–Rouge River	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Bartolucci, Rick (LIB)	Sudbury	
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough–Sud-Ouest	
Best, Margaret R. (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	House Leader, Recognized Party / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Minister of the Environment / Ministre de l'Environnement Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Broten, Hon. / L'hon. Laurel C. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre délégué à la Condition féminine
Campbell, Sarah (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	
Cansfield, Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport Minister Responsible for the 2015 Pan and Parapan American Games / Ministre responsable des Jeux panaméricains et parapanaméricains de 2015
Chiarelli, Hon. / L'hon. Bob (LIB)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Nepean	
Clark, Steve (PC)	Halton	
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Leeds–Grenville	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Coteau, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Crack, Grant (LIB)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Craitor, Kim (LIB)	Niagara Falls	
Damerla, Dipika (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	
Del Duca, Steven (LIB)	Vaughan	
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
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Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
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Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Fedeli, Victor (PC)	Nipissing	
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Kitchener–Waterloo	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	
Forster, Cindy (NDP)	Welland	Deputy House Leader, Recognized Party / Leader parlementaire adjointe de parti reconnu
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les îles	Attorney General / Procureur général
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Harris, Michael (PC)	Kitchener—Conestoga	
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hoskins, Hon. / L'hon. Eric (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment / Ministre du Développement économique, du Commerce et de l'Emploi
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West—Glanbrook / Niagara-Ouest—Glanbrook	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
Jackson, Rod (PC)	Barrie	
Jaczek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges—Markham	
Jeffrey, Hon. / L'hon. Linda (LIB)	Brampton—Springdale	
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin—Caledon	
Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket—Aurora	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Leal, Hon. / L'hon. Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	
Leone, Rob (PC)	Cambridge	
Levac, Hon. / L'hon. Dave (LIB)	Brant	
MacCharles, Hon. / L'hon. Tracy (LIB)	Pickering—Scarborough East / Pickering—Scarborough-Est	
MacLaren, Jack (PC)	Carleton—Mississippi Mills	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean—Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga—Brampton South / Mississauga—Brampton-Sud	
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity—Spadina	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Minister of Rural Affairs / Ministre des Affaires rurales Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative Minister of Consumer Services / Ministre des Services aux consommateurs
Mauro, Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay—Atikokan	
McDonell, Jim (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	
McGuinty, Dalton (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	
McKenna, Jane (PC)	Burlington	
McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale	
McNaughton, Monte (PC)	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	
McNeely, Phil (LIB)	Ottawa—Orléans	
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Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
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Milligan, Rob E. (PC)		
Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)		Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Milligan, Rob E. (PC)		
Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)		Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
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Munro, Julia (PC)	York-Simcoe	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
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Naqvi, Hon. / L'hon. Yasir (LIB) Natyshak, Taras (NDP)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
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O'Toole, John (PC)	Chatham-Kent-Essex	
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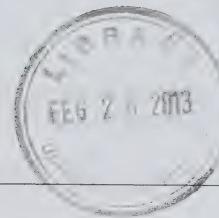
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No. 2



Nº 2

ISSN 1180-2987

Legislative Assembly of Ontario

Second Session, 40th Parliament

Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

Deuxième session, 40^e législature

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Wednesday 20 February 2013

Mercredi 20 février 2013

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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Hansard Reporting and Interpretation Services
Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Service du Journal des débats et d'interprétation
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 20 February 2013

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 20 février 2013

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

MEMBERS' PRIVILEGES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I have received two notices of intent to raise a point of privilege. I am going to hear both points in the order in which I received the notices, recognizing the member from Prince Edward—Hastings first.

Given that this matter was previously raised and fully put, I would ask that the member furnish us with a brief summary to his point, just to refresh the memory of the House.

Mr. Todd Smith: Mr. Speaker, I rise today, as you mentioned, on a point of privilege for contempt of the Legislature, after providing you with the appropriate notice in accordance with standing order 21(c). In the submission I provided to you, I gave a brief background of the events in this case, so I won't repeat all of them here as you heard the entirety on October 15, the day that the Legislature was prorogued, and have yet to rule on this because of the prorogation.

Let me remind you that on September 24, 2012, the former energy minister tabled an attestation to the House, attached to 36,000 documents, which stated, "The documents attached to this letter comprise all documents that are responsive to the committee's request regardless of privilege or confidentiality." On October 12, 2012, after being told by the Premier, countless ministers and parliamentary assistants that all the documents had been tabled, the opposition parties received an email from the government House leader's office advising us that 20,000 documents pertaining to the committee's request were being released.

Misleading the House is a serious charge. It's one which I don't take lightly, and I know that other members on this side of the House don't either. I'm concerned that statements made by the former Premier, former Minister of Energy, government House leader, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, parliamentary assistant to the Minister of the Environment, Minister of Children and Youth Services and the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration could have misled the Legislature regarding the Minister of Energy's compliance with the Speaker's ruling to produce all of the documents related to the request from the estimates committee.

As set out by McGee's Parliamentary Practice in New Zealand, in order to establish a *prima facie* finding that a

breach of privilege in contempt has occurred, three elements must be present:

(1) It must be proven that the statements were misleading;

(2) It must be established that the member, at the time, knew that the statement was incorrect;

(3) In the making of the statement, the minister intended to mislead the House.

I won't go into detail, but I'll mention that in my written submission I outlined how this case fits all three of the criteria set out by McGee.

In criminal law, the *actus reus*, also known as the guilty act, includes the omission to act. The former Premier and the former Minister of Energy, through ministerial responsibility, and the other ministers, through their duty to the Legislature, had a duty to immediately inform the Legislature that the documents tabled were not complete. Their omission to inform the Legislature about the remaining outstanding documents from the ministry and the OPA demonstrates intent and, in my opinion, could constitute a breach of our privileges.

A former Speaker of this Legislature, the Honourable Gary Carr, set out the parameters for finding a *prima facie* case of contempt relating to a charge of misleading the House. In his ruling, back on June 17, 2002, Speaker Carr stated that to satisfy a charge of contempt for misleading the House, there must be "an admission from the member accused of the conduct, or of tangible confirmation of the conduct independently proved."

In the case before us, the tangible confirmation of all the government members' conduct is the letters from OPA CEO Colin Andersen and Deputy Minister of Energy Serge Imbrogno. These letters demonstrate that the government knew on September 27, 2012, that all of the documents were indeed not tabled on September 24, 2012.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, you're the guardian of the spirit of openness, accountability and transparency in our democratic institution here at Queen's Park. I'm concerned that any ruling other than a *prima facie* case of breach of privilege in these instances will inevitably lead to even more egregious abuse.

I thank you for your time and look forward to your ruling, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank the member for his brief synopsis, as requested. I appreciate that very much, member from Prince Edward—Hastings.

The government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand today and respond to the point of privilege that has just been raised. I'd also like to notify

you and the House that I will be filing a written submission, which, as is the usual practice, I will be sharing with opposition colleagues.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to review the facts of this matter. On May 16, 2012, the Standing Committee on Estimates passed a motion ordering the former Minister of Energy, the Ministry of Energy and the Ontario Power Authority to produce "all correspondence, in any form, electronic or otherwise, that occurred between September 1, 2010, and December 31, 2011, related to the cancellation of the Oakville power plant as well as all correspondence, in any form, electronic or otherwise, that occurred between August 1, 2011, and December 31, 2011, related to the cancellation of the Mississauga power plant."

In response to the motion, approximately 36,000 records were given to the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly on September 24, 2012, in both paper and electronic form.

At the time of production, the former minister held an honest belief that the ministry and the OPA had produced all records that were responsive to the motion and in their possession. This honest belief was evidenced by the fact that the records were accompanied by a signed letter to the Clerk attesting to the fact that all responsive records had been produced to the best of their knowledge.

Over the course of the next several days, the House considered the matter of the relocation of these gas plants at length, particularly in relation to the motion moved by the member of provincial Parliament from Cambridge. During the debate, numerous members of the government caucus, including the former minister, stated in the House that all responsive records had been produced.

Contrary to the assertion made by the member for Prince Edward—Hastings as part of this point of privilege, at no time did the former Premier state in this House that all responsive records had been produced. While other members of the government caucus referenced in the member for Prince Edward—Hastings's submission did make statements in the House in this regard, every relevant statement made by those members, including the former minister, was made on the basis of an honest belief that all responsive records in the possession of the former minister, the ministry and the OPA had been produced.

In the case of the former minister, his honest belief was based on information provided to him by ministry officials that all responsive records had been identified and included in the package of records produced to the Clerk. In the case of all other members of the government caucus, their honest belief was based on the attestation letters, and specifically the attestation that all responsive records had been produced.

In and around the evening of September 27, 2012, the former minister was notified by officials at the ministry that both the ministry and the OPA had determined that their initial search for records may have missed records of certain inactive employees, and that some employees had not used consistent search terms. It's important to stress that at this time the minister was notified only of

the potential that responsive records may have been missed in the original searches.

In response, the former minister instructed officials at the ministry and the OPA to ensure that they immediately took the necessary steps to determine whether any responsive records had been missed. The former minister was aware of his obligation to notify his honourable colleagues in the Legislature, including members of the government caucus who had stated that all responsive records had been produced, in the event that it was determined that his previous statements in the House were incorrect and to ensure those records were produced to the Clerk at the earliest possible opportunity.

0910

Shortly thereafter, I in my capacity as House leader was also notified that both the ministry and the OPA had determined that their initial search for records may have missed records of certain inactive employees and that some employees may not have used consistent search terms. I was also aware of the obligation to notify honourable colleagues in the Legislature in the event that it was determined that previous statements in the House were incorrect and to support the production of those records to the Clerk at the earliest possible opportunity.

Over the course of the following two weeks, officials at the ministry and the OPA conducted an intensive expanded search to determine whether any responsive records had been missed. There was no political involvement or interference by the former minister, myself or political staff with the search process throughout the relevant period.

On October 11, 2012, the former minister was notified by the ministry and the OPA that a large number of additional documents had been identified and that records would be produced to the Clerk the next day, October 12. On the afternoon of October 12, the ministry and the OPA produced an additional 20,000 records to the Clerk.

After learning on October 11, 2012, that additional documents had been identified by the ministry and the OPA and that their earlier statements to the House had been made in error due to an honest and inadvertent mistake, the former minister and I as House leader rose in the House to correct our respective records. This was at the earliest possible moment, Mr. Speaker.

I'd now like to turn to the parliamentary precedents relevant to this case. In recent years, Speakers of this House have made their determination as to whether a *prima facie* case of contempt exists in relation to a charge of deliberately misleading the House by applying the well-established three-step test set out in David McGee's *Parliamentary Practice in New Zealand*. The McGee test is described in the text's most recent edition as follows:

"There are three elements to be established when it is alleged that a member is in contempt by reasons of a statement that the member has made: The statement must, in fact, have been misleading; it must be established that the member making the statement knew at the time the statement was made that it was incorrect; and, in making it, the member must have intended to mislead the House."

The McGee test establishes a particularly high threshold for a *prima facie* case of contempt to be established. Not only must the Speaker find that the member uttered a misleading statement; the member must have known at the time the statement was made that it was misleading and uttered the false statement in a deliberate or intentional matter.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I would like to offer the government House leader the same advice that I offered the member from Prince Edward–Hastings: to be brief, as this has already been put to the House, and we're using this as a refresher.

Hon. John Milloy: Put in another way, Mr. Speaker, it is not sufficient that the Speaker merely be satisfied that the statements made by the member were incorrect or misleading, nor is it sufficient that the Speaker be satisfied that the statements made by the member were incorrect or misleading and that the member was negligent in uttering false statements.

Mr. Speaker, I will, in my written submission, taking your advice, go through the McGee test and the applications that have been taken here and turn to the matter right here.

I would say that it's clear, based upon the McGee test and the rulings that have been made both in this Legislature and in other Legislatures, that there is no *prima facie* case of contempt in this matter. While the former minister and I provided incorrect information to the House, we did so as a result of an honest mistake and shared the belief that the information was true. When the former minister and I stated in the House that all responsive records had been produced, it was our good-faith understanding. As such, we did not utter misleading statements that we knew to be false during this time period. Once the former minister and I were notified by officials at the OPA and the ministry that an additional expanded search was being undertaken, no further incorrect statements were uttered in the House by myself or by the former Minister of Energy. More specifically, at no time after September 27, 2012, as I said, did either I or the minister state in the House that all responsive records had been produced.

The member for Prince Edward–Hastings included a list of other members of the governing party he alleges to have intentionally misled this House. Those individuals had no personal knowledge of these facts and were simply repeating in good faith assertions that had been made by the Minister of Energy. Again, these statements were, at most, the result of honest mistakes.

The additional records were produced to the House on Friday, October 12, 2012. On the morning of the following Monday, October 15, 2012—the next sitting day—the former minister and I rose in the House at the earliest possible moment to correct the record by notifying the House that, as a result of inadvertence and honest mistake, we had incorrectly told the House that all responsive records had been produced. As such, we fulfilled our obligation of notifying the House of our error and correcting the record at the earliest possible opportunity.

Because of this, the point of privilege must fail at both the second and third steps of the McGee test. Incorrect statements were made inadvertently and in good faith, relying principally on the attestation letters. They did not know at the time that their statements were false, which leads to the conclusion that the errors were not made intentionally. In light of a clear correction of the record confirming that honest belief and in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, I would therefore respectfully submit, Mr. Speaker, that no point of privilege has been made out.

At the same time, I have further comments to make on other points that were made by the member in his point of privilege, but based on your advice, I will do that in writing and, as I said at the beginning, share them with the other parties, as is the usual practice.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I recognize the House leader of the third party, the member from Timmins–James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Thank you, Speaker. I'm going to be very quick. In just a couple of minutes, I want to make a couple of points.

First of all, what's clear is that the government stood in this House repeatedly and repeatedly said they had given all the documents, and it turns out that that's not the case. So you have to decide which of it makes sense.

I think it was part of a strategy. I think the government decided in its defence of what was going on that they had to find some way to try to minimize damage politically to the government, so they decided not to release all of the documents because some of them may have been damning, and so in the end took a position that those documents in fact—that in fact those documents were withheld knowingly is the argument that the member is making.

I just want to make this one point, and the point is that, in your decision, you said, "The right to order production of documents is fundamental to and necessary for the proper functioning of the assembly. If the House and its committees do not enjoy this right, then the accountability, scrutiny and financial functions of Parliament—which go to the core of our system of responsible government—would be compromised." So the decision you have to make is: Did they know?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): My intent is to show you that maybe things haven't changed, so I can jump right into recognizing individuals by their riding. My rule still applies: You get a warning; that's it. Thank you.

I thank the members that have spoken on this issue, and I will reserve my ruling and get back to the member from Prince Edward–Hastings sharply.

MEMBERS' PRIVILEGES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Cambridge.

Mr. Rob Leone: I rise today to raise a question of privilege from a previous session after providing you

with the appropriate notice in accordance with standing order 21(c). Like my colleague from Prince Edward-Hastings, Mr. Speaker, I've provided you with a written submission. I'm only going to provide a synopsis of those points here today.

In summary, on August 27, 2012, I rose on what I believed was a *prima facie* breach of privilege regarding the Minister of Energy's and the Ontario Power Authority's failure to produce documents to the Standing Committee on Estimates. The issue I brought before you was whether the Minister of Energy and the Ontario Power Authority obstructed members and infringed on their privileges when they withheld documents requested by the Legislature. On September 13, 2012, you wrote that a *prima facie* case of privilege had been established because "the Standing Committee on Estimates was unquestionably entitled to request the documents sought from the Minister of Energy, and in the end the minister had an obligation to comply with the committee's call for those documents."

On September 25, I moved a motion referring the matter to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, and after one week of debate, the Legislature passed my motion and sent the *prima facie* breach of privilege to committee for further study. On October 15, the Legislature was prorogued and the issue was never dealt with by the committee.

0920

Parliamentary precedent supports my position on this issue at hand. On February 6, 2004, Conservative MP Garry Breitkreuz rose on a point of privilege regarding a *prima facie* breach of privilege from a previous session. In the case that Mr. Breitkreuz was referencing, the Speaker had found that a *prima facie* breach of privilege had occurred, and the matter was then referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. However, the session was prorogued and the matter was never dealt with by the committee. Once the new parliamentary session began, Mr. Breitkreuz rose on a point of privilege and asked the Speaker to rule on whether a *prima facie* question of privilege existed and to allow another motion to be moved referring the matter to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

Former Speaker of the House of Commons Peter Milliken ruled immediately that, "As I indicated in the previous session, this was a bona fide question of privilege. Accordingly, in my view, the question remains a question of privilege. The committee did not completely report on the matter, which it is entitled to do. Accordingly, I give the honourable member leave to move his motion."

Mr. Speaker, I ask that you rule on this matter in the same way that Speaker Milliken did, and allow the Legislature to proceed in a similar fashion. As such, I am prepared to move the appropriate motion to refer this issue back to the committee of the Legislature at your will. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The third party House leader and member from Timmins–James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Speaker, I don't want to repeat everything that was said; I think the point has been made. I think essentially where we're at is that the committee requested documents; those were not given on May 16, when requested. On September 13, there was a *prima facie* case of contempt that was found, and on October 2, a motion was passed by this House. The House was prorogued, and I want to just state what standing order 49 says—I would just draw to your attention: "Prorogation of the House shall not have the effect of nullifying an order or address of the House for returns or papers." So it's pretty clear that the matter is not dead as a result of prorogation.

Speaker, the point I just want to make is that a decision had been made by you, a committee was to be struck to look into the details of it, it's clear that prorogation cannot nullify that, and I ask you to maintain the decision that you made earlier.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I rise in support of the words put forward by our House leader. Speaker, you were here for this whole process. We demanded documents; we demanded hearings. We were given some documents. Upon receipt of those documents, people in our caucus, people in the opposition caucus went through them, and it was obvious to any person who went through those documents that there were substantial gaps. We raised this with the government, and we were met with a chorus of denial, that in fact everything had been put out and that we were just playing games in this House.

I have to say, Speaker, that if those ministers who spoke at the time saying that all the documents were released had actually looked at those documents, it would have been as apparent to them as to us that there were gaps. Thank you, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Forgive my rolling, but that was to another issue. I need to bring us back to this point.

On September 13, 2012, in response to a point of privilege raised by the member from Cambridge on August 27, I ruled that a *prima facie* case of privilege had been established. On October 2, the House adopted a motion to refer this matter to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. The session was then prorogued on October 15, before the committee even had its first meeting to consider this issue.

Careful research has revealed that the circumstance of a privileged matter in one of our committees being interrupted by a prorogation has not occurred in the Ontario Legislature. Moreover, it is a strikingly rare occurrence in the senior Parliaments of the Commonwealth. However, a similar instance was found to have occurred in the Canadian House of Commons in 2004.

Speaker Milliken decided that a matter of privilege that had already been ruled on and referred by the House to a committee, but left unfinished because of an intervening prorogation, could be renewed in the new session. Speaker Milliken found that the committee was entitled to conduct its review on the matter and make its report to the House. He confirmed his previous ruling that a bona

fide case of privilege existed and that he permitted the member who initially raised that matter to move his same motion to refer the matter to the committee again.

Similarly, in the matter raised by the member from Cambridge, it is true that the fact is that the October 15, 2012, prorogation terminated all business of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, including the referral of the matter of my September 13, 2012, ruling. In that ruling, a *prima facie* case of privilege had been established and, as Speaker Milliken found, a prorogation does not nullify such a finding.

I therefore reconfirm my ruling of September 13, 2012, and invite the member from Cambridge to renew his motion to refer this matter to committee.

Mr. Rob Leone: Mr. Speaker, I move that this House directs the Minister of Energy and the Ontario Power Authority to immediately table with the Clerk of the House all remaining documents related to the Oakville and Mississauga gas plants ordered by the Standing Committee on Estimates on May 16, 2012; and

That the matter of the Speaker's finding of a *prima facie* case of privilege with respect to the production of documents by the Minister of Energy and the Ontario Power Authority to the Standing Committee on Estimates be referred to the standing committee on justice, which is hereby reconstituted as it existed on September 9, 2012; and

That the committee shall be authorized to meet at the call of the Chair, concurrently with the House or when the House stands adjourned, to meet notwithstanding prorogation of the House; and

That the committee shall report back to the House its findings and recommendations within 90 calendar days, and if the House is not sitting, release with the Clerk of the House its report, except that if the committee determines that more time is required, it shall issue an interim report at the 90-day mark and then take such reasonable time as it considers necessary to complete its final report.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Leone moves that the House directs the Minister of Energy and the Ontario Power Authority to immediately table with the Clerk of the House all remaining documents related to the Oakville and Mississauga gas plants ordered by the Standing Committee on Estimates on May 16, 2012; and

That the matter of the Speaker's finding of a *prima facie* case of privilege with respect to the production of documents by the Minister of Energy and the Ontario Power Authority to the Standing Committee on Estimates be referred to the standing committee on justice, which is hereby reconstituted as it existed on September 9, 2012; and

That the committee shall be authorized to meet at the call of the Chair, concurrently with the House or when the House stands adjourned, to meet notwithstanding prorogation of the House; and

That the committee shall report back to the House its findings and recommendations within 90 calendar days, and if the House is not sitting, release with the Clerk of the House its report, except that if the committee deter-

mines that more time is required, it shall issue an interim report at the 90-day mark and then take such reasonable time as it considers necessary to complete its final report.

The member from Cambridge.

Mr. Rob Leone: Mr. Speaker, I want to be very brief here and to not hold up the proceedings of this House. We've dealt with this matter in the previous session of this Legislature. I don't wish to repeat all that I've commented with respect to that, but we do have a case of privilege that has been established. We need to set up the committees immediately to investigate the reasons behind what we feel is an obstruction of this Legislature's work. We wish to proceed as soon as possible on this matter, Mr. Speaker, and report back to this House, where it may be dealt with.

I'm not going to take any more time dealing with this matter or debating this matter. I hereby suggest and urge this House to adopt this motion so we can get to the bottom of what happened with the cancellation of the two power plants.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I rise in support of the motion that is before this House. As New Democrats made clear several weeks ago, we thought there was perhaps another solution to this situation. We had asked the Premier to consider taking this matter out of the House and having it dealt with independently. We thought that was a good way to make sure the House doesn't become overly seized with this matter. We were very careful to indicate that a public inquiry would be something that wouldn't necessarily be extremely expensive, because many of the documents are already out. It would not require travel in terms of moving around the province. In fact, we put a time frame on it of about six months to make sure that the people of this province weren't unduly burdened with the cost of a public inquiry—making sure, however, that the people of this province get the answers that they deserve when it comes to not only how the decision was made, but how the information was determined not to be necessary to be released.

0930

At this point, we are in a position to support this motion, because we understand that this needs to be dealt with. We had hoped that we could have gotten it done outside of the chamber through the public inquiry process, but New Democrats certainly do look forward to getting the answers that the people of this province have deserved for far too long.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate.

Hon. John Milloy: I stand to speak on this matter with a spirit of disappointment and sadness. I think all members in this Legislature and those who are watching it would realize that we have a new Premier and a new government which has come to power with an interest in nothing less than full co-operation with the—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order, please. There was quiet throughout, up until this moment.

Mr. John Yakabuski: He's inflaming the opposition with those comments.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): And those comments are not helpful.

Hon. John Milloy: This government has come to power, with this new Premier, in a spirit of co-operation with the opposition. There have been numerous meetings, members know, on the public record, between the Premier and both opposition leaders. Yesterday's speech from the throne contained many ideas that had been put forward by both parties and was an attempt to find a middle ground and make sure that this Legislature works.

Mr. Speaker, I had the privilege, of course, of being reappointed as House leader. As House leader, the direction I received—the marching orders, so to speak—from the Premier was to work with the opposition and be as constructive as possible to make sure that this Legislature, this House, worked as we move forward. I was asked to reach out to the opposition, for example, and find a way that we could reinstate standing committees as quickly as possible, and I'm pleased to report that those discussions are going well.

There has been a full acknowledgement on this side of the Legislature of the concerns that exist over the cancellation of gas plants in Mississauga and Oakville. I would remind members that the Premier, in fact, asked the Auditor General to expand his investigation so that he would take a look at the Oakville situation and report back to members of the Legislature. Recognizing this concern, there was no attempt made by this government to somehow put it on the back burner. Instead, we sat down with the opposition and we outlined what we saw as two possible paths forward.

One was the appointment of a select committee, with a broad and responsible mandate, which would look into a variety of issues related to decisions around the gas plant and, at the same time, would be able to take a broad look and report back to this committee and, I would hope, find lessons for this government and future governments on the whole issue of locating gas plants. We also made it very clear that such a select committee would be in no way hampered to look at a variety of issues, including the production of documents, and, once again, perhaps come forward with what we would say would be very responsible recommendations to this Legislature on how to deal with requests for large quantities of documents, and sensitive documents.

The other option that we had was to move forward with Mr. Leone's motion—the member from Cambridge. What it is, Mr. Speaker, is nothing short of a mean-spirited and vindictive motion aimed at the former Minister of Energy, who, I would remind you—and, through you, members of this Legislature—is an individual who had an outstanding career here in the Legislature, has since resigned from politics and is no longer a member of the Legislature.

These were the two choices we put forward to the opposition. I felt that we had very good discussions with the opposition, and I was quite frankly surprised yester-

day, through the press conferences that were held, to learn that they had rejected the idea outright of a special committee to look into this matter, and instead we're moving forward with Mr. Leone's motion, targeted against a private citizen whose only goal, when he was Minister of Energy, was to try to balance two competing interests.

I think it's important that we look at the facts. I'm going to take a second to review what is at the base, or what is at the heart, of the motion that we're discussing today.

Between May 9 and July 11, 2012, the then Minister of Energy, Mr. Bentley, appeared before the Standing Committee on Estimates for the purpose of answering questions regarding the estimates of his ministry. While the minister answered questions relating to a number of issues, committee members from the official opposition spent considerable time asking the minister questions relating to the two gas plants which were to have been built in Oakville and Mississauga, respectively. The members of the opposition will know all about those gas plants, Mr. Speaker, because they vigorously opposed those over and over again, and in fact campaigned against them, as did the Liberal Party.

The minister of the day was repeatedly asked to answer questions relating to these facilities. The overwhelming majority of the questions related specifically to the ongoing outstanding legal proceedings and confidential negotiations that were occurring at that time. The former Minister of Energy attempted to strike an effective balance between the committee's authority to ask those questions and request those documents and the need to protect the public interest in the midst of highly sensitive commercial negotiations and litigation.

Mr. Speaker, I think we all recognize that the former minister had a responsibility as a minister of the crown, and that is a different responsibility than what we have as members. The Chair of the committee at the time, the member for Beaches—East York, recognized the precarious situation of the Minister of Energy. In fact, he repeatedly ruled that while committee members were permitted to ask such questions, the minister was able to exercise his discretion and respond to them in a matter that protected the interests of the province.

I'd like to quote from the committee Hansard of May 16. Mr. Prue, the Chair, said, "The minister has the right to decline either giving that documentation or giving voice to that documentation during his answering of the questions."

I further quote from Mr. Prue: "I would advise that I'm going to allow the motion to proceed, but I would also advise—and I think the minister"—that's Mr. Bentley—"being a lawyer himself, knows full well that he may choose to answer the question in such a way as not to prejudice the province in any way, and I would expect him to do so. That would be my ruling."

The minister relied on the Chair's repeated statements and rulings that he was permitted to respond to questions and document requests from committee members in a

manner that protected the interests of the province. As a result, Mr. Speaker, the minister wrote to the committee on May 30 and advised it that he was exercising his discretion and would not be able to produce the requested documentation, as they were confidential, subject to solicitor-client privilege, litigation privilege or highly commercially sensitive. Unfortunately, the official opposition ignored the flags that were raised by the minister. They showed no restraint, and they pushed forward with the opposition.

The official opposition and the third party, in their attempt over the past couple of months to vilify the former Minister of Energy, have told this House that he hid or concealed these records. It is simply not true. The record shows that the Minister of Energy at all times was trying to balance two important yet competing public interests: supremacy of Parliament versus the protection of taxpayers' interests. I think the best proof of all was on July 10, when the then minister announced that the OPA had reached an agreement with Greenfield to relocate the Mississauga facility and that the government had accepted the OPA's recommendation to relocate the Mississauga facility at the Lambton station in Sarnia. In addition, the minister announced that it had settled the related civil proceedings in the state of New York.

The legal matters relating to the Mississauga gas plant having been settled, the minister directed his ministry to provide the committee with all correspondence related to the Mississauga facility that was responsive to the motion of May 16, except for records that were subject to solicitor-client privilege. Those documents were provided to the committee.

As the negotiations with TransCanada regarding the Oakville plant were still ongoing, the then minister was not in a position to produce these documents prior to your ruling. On September 13, 2012, the Speaker—you, Mr. Speaker—ruled that, while a *prima facie* breach of privilege had been established, he would set aside the matter and ask the three House leaders to “take it upon themselves to find a path that can satisfy the request of the estimates committee.”

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The traditional procedure when the Speaker apprises the House that a *prima facie* breach of privilege has been found is that the member raising the matter is immediately allowed to move a motion. In this matter, however, Mr. Speaker, you exercised your discretion to follow the approach adopted by Speaker Milliken in the Afghan detainee matter by setting aside his ruling in order to allow the House leaders to “devise a means where both their concerns are met.”

This approach was taken for two reasons, as evident in your ruling. First, you recognize that there were two competing public interests at play: the interest of the committee in exercising its parliamentary privileges and the interest of the Minister of Energy in temporarily refraining from the disclosure of sensitive information in the midst of commercial negotiations and related proceedings. You also, Mr. Speaker, recognized an op-

portunity for the three parties, through “frank communication,” to settle the matter in a way that satisfied the request of the estimates committee. Your ruling, Mr. Speaker, clearly laid out that this was a unique situation, unlike other cases of privilege, that warranted a unique solution.

Mr. Speaker having turned the matter over to the House leaders, members will be aware that the House leaders met on four separate occasions to determine whether a solution could be found. On this side of the House, we had high hopes that the parties would ultimately reach a solution which balanced these two competing interests, between the rights of the committee to ask for information and at the same time commercial and solicitor-client confidences. The government tabled two separate proposals that would have facilitated the public release of the records while accommodating our concern about the ongoing commercial negotiations and related proceedings. Mr. Speaker, I remember back to those discussions, and I’m sad to say that the opposition rejected both of these out of hand. They were more interested in personal attacks than getting to the bottom of the issue.

We are now many months later, and much has changed. We have a new Premier in government, who has consistently spoken about our willingness to cooperate with the opposition. Minister Bentley is not only no longer Minister of Energy; he in fact is now a private citizen and has resigned his post as a member of provincial Parliament. But, Mr. Speaker, what hasn’t changed is the mean-spirited nature of the opposition in moving forward with this motion and rejecting our idea for a select committee that would look into all aspects of this and come forward with rulings or with recommendations which we think would be of value to all members of the Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, we will not be voting for this motion. I would also like to say that, other than the comments that I have put on the record, we will not be participating in the debate. We want to move forward with the business of the people of Ontario.

What I am hoping for is that members of this House, and I’m particularly thinking of the New Democratic Party, will see their way forward to reject the motion that has been put forward by the member for Cambridge and at the same time that they will, by rejecting it, move forward with the select committee, which will have an opportunity to look at all aspects of this and make a responsible report moving forward.

Mr. Speaker, I must confess that I’m not hopeful of that. I believe that the fact is that we’re going to see the opposition come together to support this motion, which is aimed at a private citizen who did nothing more than try to deal with the precarious problem of balancing two interests. As a result, I would like to move an amendment to the motion. As I say, Mr. Speaker, I have little hope that it’s not going to pass. So in closing, in order to make sure that the committee’s work is done in the most responsible fashion, I move that the motion be amended to add the following paragraph after the second paragraph:

"That, in exercising its authority throughout the committee proceedings, the committee shall adhere to the minimum standards of procedural fairness and the principles of fundamental justice, as required by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms."

Mr. Speaker, I think at a minimum that will protect the rights of the former Minister of Energy as well as other members that will come forward, so I'd like to move that motion.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader moves that the motion be amended by adding the following paragraph after the second paragraph of the original motion:

"That, in exercising its authority throughout the committee proceedings, the committee shall adhere to the minimum standards of procedural fairness and the principles of fundamental justice, as required by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms."

I now offer an opportunity for further debate on the amendment.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I'll be speaking to the amendment and the context within which the amendment has been made.

As the House leader said, he's disappointed with what's happening in the chamber this morning, as are we with the response of the government. Speaker, it is as if the talking points from last fall have simply been taken out of the closet, put back on the page and read into Hansard. We are not seeing an approach by this government that recognizes that it's going to have to work with the opposition. When Andrea Horwath made a very reasonable suggestion that a public inquiry be held so that this House would be able to do other work as well, that was spurned by this government. What we heard again today, what we hear now, is again the defence of the indefensible.

Speaker, unfortunately, the government did not support the thrust of a public inquiry. We have Mr. Leone's motion. We intend to support that motion. We intend to have the hearings here at Queen's Park. Obviously, those hearings have to be held within the context of constitutional guarantees and natural justice. Would anyone argue with that? I believe not—none. But for the government to suggest that all the documents have been provided, that all has been done that is necessary, stretches credibility to the breaking point.

You, Speaker, were here when you heard this House leader last fall attack us on this side of the House for questioning the completeness of the documentation that was provided. As I had said earlier, you do not have to be a lawyer to go through those documents and see that documents were missing. Clearly, either the House leader had not looked at the documents or the then Minister of Energy had not looked at the documents or others on the government side had not looked at the documents—which I find personally very hard to believe—or they were not representing what was the case. That will be determined through discussions and hearings and testimony in committee.

Speaker, there are substantial matters that have to be addressed in the course of those hearings at committee—substantial matters. One of the things that has struck us is that there are far more leads going into the then Premier's office than seem to have come out in the documents. We put forward a request for information under freedom of information to the Premier's office for any documents related to Project Vapour. In fact, Speaker, some of those documents from the Premier's office were included in the second bundle that we were provided with. The response from the Premier's office was that no such documents exist, although I have them in my hand.

We have appealed the response of the Premier's office, and in part the response of the Premier's office was, "We're not required to hold onto documents." We need to determine—and it is an open question at this point—if documents were destroyed in the course of this matter. And if they were, the seriousness of the matter before us is substantially heightened.

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Speaker, as you are well aware, documents were presented in a media conference showing that a staff person from the Ministry of Energy attended at a meeting with staff from the Ontario Power Authority and told the staff from the Ontario Power Authority which documents to release and which documents not to release. The question arises, and must be answered: Who directed that staff person from the Ministry of Energy? What were her instructions? And why did a vice-president of the Ontario Power Authority listen to those instructions on what could and could not be released?

I think any reasonable person should look at the motion before us and understand the situation in which incomplete provision of documents was at first denied, then admitted, and then when further documentation, relevant to this case, tied to this case, was asked for, then further denied.

This Legislature has the legal right to demand documentation, demand that it not be withheld, and that those who were responsible for making the documentation available must answer for that, must provide the documentation and let us know—legislators standing in for the public, the people we represent—who made the decisions to hold back documents and for what reason. Because without that, Speaker, we don't have rule by a democratically elected Legislature; we have rule by a very narrow group of people who are not open with the public, who are not accountable to the public.

It is critical that these committee hearings go forward, that the matter be put before us, and that the people of Ontario have an opportunity to understand fully what is at stake.

Speaker, it is my hope that if the Liberals will not vote for this resolution, that they will at least not continue the script of last fall and filibuster against this resolution. We have heard the arguments; we understand what's at stake. I believe everyone in this House has had that opportunity to review them. I urge that we have a speedy debate, that we resolve it this morning, and that we go into committee and get to work.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate on the amendment?

The government House leader, Mr. Milloy, has an amendment to the motion:

"That, in exercising its authority throughout the committee proceedings, the committee shall adhere to the minimum standards of procedural fairness and the principles of fundamental justice, as required by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms."

All in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed?

The amendment carries.

Further debate on the motion?

We now have the motion on the floor, as amended.

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

So moved.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

THRONE SPEECH DEBATE

Consideration of the speech of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor at the opening of the session.

Ms. Soo Wong: I move, seconded by my colleague the member from Ottawa–Orléans, that an humble address be presented to His Honour the Lieutenant Governor as follows:

To the Honourable David C. Onley, Lieutenant Governor of Ontario:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly of the province of Ontario now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Ms. Wong, seconded by Mr. McNeely, moves that an humble address be presented to His Honour the Lieutenant Governor as follows:

To the Honourable David C. Onley, Lieutenant Governor of Ontario:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly of the province of Ontario now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has addressed to us.

Ms. Wong.

Ms. Soo Wong: I'll be sharing my time with the member from Ottawa–Orléans.

Mr. Speaker, it is with great pride and humility that I accept the honour of presenting this motion and responding to the throne speech. Likewise, I am honoured and humbled to serve the residents of my riding of Scarborough–Agincourt and to serve in this second session of the 40th Parliament of Ontario.

Scarborough–Agincourt is a riding of diverse people, diverse needs and diverse ambitions, and it is through these many different talents, cultures, experiences and convictions that the residents of Scarborough–Agincourt maintain a strong, robust and caring community. It is a growing community committed to working together and helping each other.

The riding of Scarborough–Agincourt is much like all parts of Ontario. It is strong, it is growing, and it is a place to celebrate diversity of all citizens. I'm very proud to represent such a vibrant community. I'm thankful to all those who have come before me.

I'm especially grateful for the contribution of my predecessor, the Honourable Gerry Phillips, who represented Scarborough–Agincourt in this Legislature from 1987 to 2011. Mr. Phillips was a lifelong advocate for the people of Scarborough. Elected as a trustee, he served 11 years in the Scarborough Board of Education and the Metro Toronto School Board.

Our predecessors have laid a foundation for our continued success, not only in this Legislature but also for Ontarians from all parts of this province. A community cannot exist without visionaries, nor can it develop without the hard work of the dedicated citizens.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I would suggest that it's pretty loud in here, and I can't hear the member. If we want to do 52 sidebars, you want to take them outside, please. I'd appreciate it. I can't hear a word she's saying, so due diligence is in order. Thank you.

Ms. Soo Wong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We are all truly fortunate to be a part of such a progressive province, and I'm honoured to serve the wonderful people of Scarborough–Agincourt.

Speaking of our histories and those visionaries who have led our province, yesterday His Honour took time to recognize one of his predecessors, an Ontario hero. He overcame personal adversity to be recognized nationally and internationally as a great Ontarian and a great Canadian. Of course, I'm speaking of the Honourable Lincoln Alexander. Before I continue, I would like to take a moment to honour this Ontario hero and tell a story dating back to my personal early experiences and interactions with the Honourable Lincoln Alexander.

Shortly after graduating from the University of Toronto, I spent much of my time volunteering and fund-raising for cystic fibrosis. I was involved in organizing a city-wide fashion show and competition, with proceeds going to the Toronto chapter of the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation. I wrote to His Honour, inviting him to the inaugural fashion show and competition. He responded to my letter personally, and he was keen to support both cystic fibrosis and young designers across the city of Toronto. His Honour attended the entire event and made sure every young designer was recognized for their contribution to the fashion show.

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My other encounter with the Honourable Lincoln Alexander involved St. John Ambulance. I was a

certified CPR and first aid instructor and participated in the annual St. John Ambulance first aid responders' competition. His Honour attended this event. When he saw me across the room, he quickly came over and had a long conversation with me. I remember fondly his kind words, his sense of humour and caring nature. His Honour made sure that everyone who participated in the competition felt comfortable and have a role to play in saving another person's life.

My family came to Ontario from Hong Kong in 1970. I was eight years old. My dad came to Canada earlier, in the early 1960s. Both my parents faced many challenges, such as learning a new language and adapting to a new way of life. I myself had to adapt to a new school system and learn how to make new friends. Yet despite the many challenges our family faced in the early years, we always knew Canada and Ontario would be the place of our new home.

My parents valued the importance of knowledge, duty, hard work and a need to help others. Hence, my sister, my brother and I have all pursued careers in health care. I'm here today because my parents pushed me to learn, but I'm also here today, Mr. Speaker, because our public education system provided me with the opportunity to learn and to grow.

As a graduate of Danforth technical institute, I was given many opportunities to excel, to get involved in various extracurricular activities and, most importantly, to contribute to my school community. I was first elected as a student council member but also was the first student council president and yearbook editor. I also had many great teachers, like Mr. Power, Mrs. Walker, Mrs. Calder and Vice-Principal Davidson, who all encouraged and challenged me with many ideas and thought processes.

During my undergraduate days as a nursing student, I saw the many challenges of vulnerable patients and their families. I learned very early in nursing school of the need to advocate for children, youth, seniors, women and new Canadians. What I learned is that education is a key social determinant of health, for success and, most importantly, Mr. Speaker, for opportunity, and is an essential element for improving the lives of new Canadians.

It is with this in mind that I tell you that Scarborough-Agincourt is home to some of the best public schools in Ontario, schools that support many students from Canadian families who are new to this country. Many of these families face financial challenges, and many of them are learning English as a second language. Yet with the leadership and guidance of strong principals, I know we will continue to improve students' learning experience.

For the past 10 years, this government has understood the need to build a strong public education system. As a former school board trustee, I have seen the positive results of the investments we have made in our schools. For example, we know that when kids eat healthy, they have a better learning experience and will therefore have a better chance to succeed. That's why I'm very proud that this government passed the Healthy Food for Healthy Schools Act. I was very proud to raise this issue

in the House last year, when we passed the motion that designated May as healthy active month, and I'm very proud to be a member of the Healthy Kids panel, to develop a report that will help us to reduce childhood obesity by 20% over five years.

My riding of Scarborough-Agincourt also has great libraries, like the Bridlewood library, Agincourt library and Steeles library. For the past seven years, I have worked collaboratively with local youth and residents to create one of the most successful community-based reading programs, the reading circle. On most Saturdays, Mr. Speaker, you'll find me participating in this weekly reading program supporting literacy in early years and providing opportunities for young people.

My riding of Scarborough-Agincourt is also a riding that looks after itself. For many years, Agincourt Community Services Association, better known as ACSA, has assisted those most in the need, providing food banks, job fairs and outreach. ACSA is a non-profit, multi-service agency at the heart of Agincourt, addressing needs and empowering children, youth, newcomers, homeless and underserved communities to build a better tomorrow. From providing youth with employment services, to establishing food banks, to stopping forced marriages, ACSA is one of the many organizations in my riding tailoring specialized services towards the specific needs of our diverse communities.

It is this most important aspect of my riding, Mr. Speaker—diversity—that Scarborough-Agincourt prides itself on. My riding has young people, seniors, Chinese, South Asians, Koreans, Japanese, Tamils, Muslims, Christians and Buddhists. Scarborough-Agincourt is also the first home of many new Canadians. That's what's great about Scarborough-Agincourt. At a time when countries like the United Kingdom and Germany have called multiculturalism a failure, my riding, like so many others in Canada, has shown that we can move forward together to build a strong community that respects and embraces diversity.

Together, Mr. Speaker, Scarborough-Agincourt has built a strong community, and I know we can do the same to continue to build a stronger Ontario. My proudest moment as an MPP is seeing our young people succeed, and this speech from the throne lays a foundation for the youth of Scarborough-Agincourt and across Ontario to grow up, to continue to succeed and to prosper.

Ontarians and the residents of Scarborough-Agincourt want to know that they and their families will be able to prosper as Ontario moves forward. They want assurances that their children will receive the best education available. They want to feel secure that they will continue to have an excellent post-secondary education system to further enhance knowledge and understanding and that Ontario will remain a leader in research and development. They want to feel confident that there will be jobs and opportunities for this generation and the next. And they want to know that when they need it, Ontario's health care system will provide them with excellent and timely care.

The vision laid out yesterday in the throne speech outlined what is needed for the next generation, Mr. Speaker. When we're talking about the economy, education, transit, health care, safety and jobs, we are really talking about a better province for our children and our children's children.

Our government is committed to be fiscally responsible. Ontario's finances are in steady hands. Our government will introduce a balanced approach to balancing the budget and will continue to implement the recommendations from the Drummond report, including the work to evaluate corporate tax compliance. The throne speech also outlined the government's commitment to working collaboratively with the opposition and small businesses to explore an increase in the employer health tax exemption threshold.

Our government plans to renew partnership with businesses, educational institutions, not-for-profits and labour to build a modern, competitive and dynamic economy.

Mr. Speaker, when it comes to education, Ontario has seen significant improvement, and I'm pleased that we will continue to work to protect these gains. As a former school trustee, I know that education is the key to a progressive and prosperous province. Test scores are up, dropout rates are down, Ontario's class sizes are smaller and graduation rates are higher than ever.

This throne speech also highlights this government's commitment to keep building early childhood education, including the successful extension of full-day kindergarten. This is providing our children with the head start they need to be successful in a competitive global economy. In the throne speech, our government spoke about respecting our teachers, support staff, principals and school boards.

Our government also recognizes that young people must be given an opportunity to be literate in the languages of tomorrow so that they can pursue the paths of their choosing and prepare for the challenges ahead. Our government is determined to support, nurture and respect our young people. Through the new creation of the permanent Premier's Youth Advisory Council, our youth will be given an opportunity to work together, to believe in themselves, to be creative, to critically think and to support their entrepreneurial spirit. Ontario's youth are among some of the brightest innovators in the world and we need to put them to work.

In Scarborough-Agincourt last year, a couple of high school students received international recognition. Together, two young teenagers from Scarborough's Agincourt Collegiate Institute in my riding successfully sent a Lego-man to the edge of space, and they have video to prove it. Using a weather balloon, some Lego, a video camera and some imagination, these young people captured stunning images and captured the interest of viewers from around the world, proving that when supported with necessary resources, Ontario's young people are ready to innovate and change the world.

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Our government believes our First Nation, Métis and Inuit children must share in every opportunity. In the

throne speech, our government indicated our commitment to close the gap with their peers so that First Nation, Métis and Inuit children and youth can live, learn, play and prosper.

The jobs of the future require a workforce educated for the future. The way forward is an accessible post-secondary education system that recognizes the necessity of mobility and affordability. That is why this throne speech continues to commit to the 30% off tuition fee grant for students from families earning less than \$160,000. This is an investment we must continue to protect and that will ensure that youth in Ontario are among the most highly educated in the world.

Our government is committed to expanding the availability of French post-secondary programs in central and southwestern Ontario. That's the right thing to do.

We also recognize that young people need to find jobs, good jobs—not just any jobs; good jobs. Youth unemployment is a serious problem. We need to do better. I have worked with business leaders in my riding to find new and innovative ways to create jobs for young people. This past Saturday I hosted a job fair at a local mall in my riding, and brought together employers, employment services, self-employment and entrepreneur opportunities and job seekers. Nearly 1,000 people participated. I know that this exciting and successful event will mean that many young people in my riding will be able to find part-time and summer employment. It is with this type of new thinking and collaboration that we can move forward.

We will need to help youth and the unemployed find a new path into the workforce. By joining forces with educators, colleges, universities, training partners and employers, we will develop new opportunities for young people and the unemployed to find employment and develop skills. We will commit to creating partnerships, co-op placements and programs that bring students from the classroom into the workforce, developing skills and preparing for the next generation of engineers, entrepreneurs, nurses and educators. Our government believes in establishing opportunities for young people to enhance their skills and find placements in other co-op programs which will enable them to gain valuable, real-world experiences.

In Scarborough-Agincourt, we have many co-op and internship opportunities for our young people to have experiential learning and internship. But our government believes that young people need to prepare with the appropriate tools for the right time.

We also believe that an educated, skilled and diverse workforce is Ontario's greatest strength. This is something that I see every day in Scarborough-Agincourt: The many different talents of residents result in a creative, caring society and a viable workforce for almost any company in any sector. We will use this diversity to bring new investment to Ontario. By visiting emerging markets such as Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe, the Middle East and South America, our government will develop meaningful partnerships with foreign enterprises and governments as well as focusing on creating good jobs for Ontarians.

Capitalizing on creating trade corridors and expanding our infrastructure where necessary will make Ontario even more attractive to global markets. Our government is committed to facilitating the smooth transfer of goods through important hubs like Windsor, across the Detroit River international crossing. The improvement of this important international crossing will open new opportunities and expand the network of our possibilities with valuable international partners.

We also believe in looking within our own borders to explore new economic terrains. Entrepreneurs and small business owners are the backbone of our communities. This government will ensure that these entrepreneurs and community leaders receive the capital they will require to grow, and growth means jobs. For young Ontarians, this will mean the ability to create their own jobs.

Debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I'd like to thank the member, and I'll reassure the member that once debate begins again this afternoon, she'll have the floor. It is now 10:15; this House stands recessed until 10:30 this morning.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'd like to welcome to the House my wife, Kate Bartz, and my brother-in-law, a University of Laurier student, Harrison Bartz.

Mr. Jonah Schein: I'd like to welcome Laura Van Harmelen, who's a student in my office and a student at Ryerson University.

Mr. Kim Craitor: I'm extremely pleased to introduce to the House Doug and Linda Reid, who are on my right in the members' gallery. They are sitting in the gallery for a special reason. They're here because they're grandparents; they're the grandparents of one of our pages, Lauren George, who is a page from my riding of Niagara Falls, Niagara-on-the-Lake and Fort Erie. Welcome.

Mr. Peter Shurman: It gives me great pleasure to introduce today our page captain from Thornhill, Daniella Mikanovsky, and her family in the west members' gallery: Moshe Mikanovsky, Hagit Mikanovsky, Abigail Mikanovsky and Talia Mikanovsky, all with us. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: It's my pleasure to welcome the family of page Justin O'Brien from my riding of Pickering-Scarborough East to the Ontario Legislature today. We have his parents, Anne-Marie and Paul O'Brien, in the members' gallery and brother Adam O'Brien. His grandparents were here earlier: Annette Spahn and Jack O'Brien. Justin is serving as page captain today. Welcome, Justin.

RESIGNATION OF MEMBERS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): During the recess, vacancies have occurred in the membership of the House

by reason of the resignation of Christopher Bentley as the member of the electoral district of London West and Dwight Duncan as the member of the electoral district of Windsor-Tecumseh, both effective February 14, 2013. Accordingly, I have issued my warrant to the Chief Electoral Officer for the issue of a writ for these by-elections.

TABLING OF SESSIONAL PAPERS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): During the recess, the following reports of parliamentary officers were tabled:

—on October 19, 2012, the 2010-11 annual report of the Chief Electoral Officer and the 2011 general election post-event report from the Chief Electoral Officer;

—on October 24, 2012, a report entitled In the Line of Duty from the Ombudsman;

—on October 30, 2012, an annual report, 2011-12, open meeting law enforcement team from the Ombudsman;

—on November 15, 2012, financial statements from the year ended March 31, 2011, and March 31, 2012, from the Auditor General; and a report regarding the privacy breach of Elections Ontario from the Chief Electoral Officer; and the Chief Electoral Officer's Report on Privacy at Elections Ontario;

—on December 4, 2012, the 2012 annual greenhouse gas progress report from the Environmental Commissioner;

—on December 12, 2012, the 2012 annual report of the Auditor General;

—on January 3, 2013, the 2011-12 annual report from the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth;

—on January 8, 2013, the annual energy conservation progress report, 2011, volume 1, from the Environmental Commissioner; and

—on February 6, 2013, the 2011 annual report from the Chief Medical Officer of Health.

It is now time for question period.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. Tim Hudak: Let me first say on behalf of the Ontario PC caucus: We want to extend our congratulations and best wishes to the now 25th Premier of the province of Ontario, Kathleen Wynne. It was, Speaker, a special moment to see—

Interjection: Put that in an ad.

Mr. Tim Hudak: “Put that in an ad”—to see Jane here and the grandkids behind—a very special moment. So, congratulations.

Speaker, I have the very simple and direct first question for Premier Wynne. Premier, why did you leave the concept of a wage freeze out of your throne speech altogether?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise in this House, in this role, and an honour.

Thank you very much for the question from the Leader of the Opposition. I made it clear in our throne speech—we made it clear that our priority is to make sure that we are fiscally responsible. We have worked over the past months to negotiate with the broader public sector to make sure that wage constraints were in place. But Mr. Speaker, we are not in the business, on this side of the House, of making decisions that will constrain us in the future. We're not in the business of slashing. We're not in the business of disrespecting or denigrating the people who deliver the services that are so important to the people of Ontario. So, working with employees, working with the people who deliver services, is the task that we will take, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Well, obviously, Speaker, that gives us grave concern that the Premier is signalling that all bets are off when it comes to controlling spending in the province of Ontario. We have a view of a stronger province of Ontario, an Ontario that leads Canada again, that leads us in job creation and to make sure that we don't mortgage the future of our kids or grandkids by running up the debt.

The Premier said in her throne speech that she thinks it's essential that the OPS is treated with respect. The point that I have is, it's the taxpayers who have not been treated with respect by the previous Premier—or this one. I want to make sure we're absolutely clear to the Premier: Are you telling us today that the wage freeze is now off the table altogether?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I just want to examine what the premise of this question is. I think the premise of this question is, there is only one way to be fiscally responsible. I reject that, Mr. Speaker. I reject the notion that the only way to be fiscally responsible is to do it the way that the Leader of the Opposition is suggesting.

As MPPs, we have led the way by taking a five-year wage freeze, Mr. Speaker. We have put in place program spending restraints to reduce Ontario's debt-to-GDP. We've said we're going to eliminate the deficit by 2017. We have said that we are going to put those constraints in place, and we've been doing it. We have worked with the public sector. We have brought in 0% increases. We have put that wage constraint in place. That's what we will continue to do, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Respectfully, Premier, let me just examine the premise of my question. Are you in favour of a public sector wage freeze or are you opposed to a public sector wage freeze?

When public sector wages make up at least 55% of public sector spending, it seems to me obvious that the first step you need to take to control spending is to freeze wages across the board. That will save us \$2 billion a year.

You had moved to do that at least with teachers, but what we saw was a government that then threw that legislation overboard and demoted the cabinet minister who was responsible for the wage freeze at the time.

Premier, your first decision was to increase the size of your cabinet by 25%. I think I'm hearing today that you're also abandoning a wage freeze goal in the province of Ontario.

I'll ask you again: Clearly, yes or no, are you saying that a province-wide, across-the-board wage freeze for the public service has been abandoned by the Liberal government?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Just specifically on the wage freeze, Mr. Speaker: The current 12-month average annual wage increase for the broader public service is 0.2%. Wage constraint is in place. We have been working on that and we are having success.

But here's what I support: I support fiscal responsibility, I support economic growth and I support increased employment in the context of a fair society. That's who we are. That's what the people of Ontario expect. We are going to do everything in our power to move forward on that fiscal responsibility and that fair society. That is what we stand for, Mr. Speaker and I believe it is what the people of Ontario expect us to do.

1040

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier: The Premier references a fair society. Fairness also means that those in the private sector need to get a break as well. They've had higher taxes, they are paying more and more, and they've seen their wages stagnate or drop. You now are indicating that the floodgates are open for increased spending in the public sector; the wage freeze is now off.

The Fraser Institute put out a study today, Speaker, that shows the disparity between the exact same job in the private sector compared to the public sector. I think an issue of fairness is that if you do the same job in government as in the private sector, the pay should be equal. The opportunities should be there. You shouldn't have this kind of dichotomy that the McGuinty Liberals drive.

So cabinet is larger; the wage freeze is off. I understand why the public sector union leaders were all smiles yesterday. It looks like spending is going to continue.

Can the Premier identify in the throne speech what particular McGuinty government programs she is going to reverse or eliminate?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The work that we've been doing over the past few months and the work that my colleague the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care has been doing is exactly the work that has to be done to make government sustainable, to make the health care system sustainable, to transform the way we deliver services that actually will meet the needs of the people of the province, Mr. Speaker.

It is very easy to stand up and to use a sound bite that sounds reasonable but actually would not lead to the kind

of change that has to happen. So if we look at health care spending, and I know the Minister of Health will want to address this because it is the biggest budget item, the changes that we're making are changes that will put the health care system on a sustainable footing, that will take people out of costly acute care beds and deliver service in the community and at home, Mr. Speaker. That's the kind of intelligent change that needs to happen.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: On the issue of competitiveness and support for the private sector, Mr. Speaker, we are a competitive jurisdiction. If you look at our neighbouring jurisdictions, we are competitive, and that's why jobs are coming to the province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: If I follow the Premier's argument, she seems to indicate now that a public sector wage freeze is not a reasonable proposition. She seems to be backpedalling from that. I guess they're now joining the NDP in opposing a public sector wage freeze.

I guess the good news, Speaker, is that if you believe that Ontario is on the right track, you now have two parties to choose from: the Liberals and the NDP. But if you think Ontario is on the wrong track and we need a better approach, a better plan to get Ontario back on top, the choice is clear: The PC Party has that plan.

Let me ask the Premier directly again my second question. Premier, can you point out, in your throne speech—aside from banning the wage freeze, can you tell me one Dalton McGuinty program that you're going to reverse, one Dalton McGuinty policy that you're not going to implement? Or is the new Premier a lot like the old Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, let's talk about how we are going to make the services that we deliver to the people of the province sustainable, because I think that should be the objective of all the parties in this House. How are we going to create conditions that will allow business and will encourage business to come to the province to create jobs?

To the question about competitiveness, since 2007 we have got seven examples here of how we have reduced taxes, created an environment for the private sector: the accelerated elimination of capital tax; the cutting of the capital tax rate by 21% retroactive to January 1, 2007; budget cut taxes, \$750 over four years; enhanced tax credits for businesses that hire apprentices; extended Ontario Innovation Tax Credit to more businesses. The HST, which, as we know, was a Conservative policy that they abandoned when we brought it in, brings \$500 million annually in savings for businesses. We cut the corporate income tax rate from 14% to 12% in 2010.

Those are all policies and decisions that we made, Mr. Speaker, that have made us more competitive and that I would have expected the Leader of the Opposition to support, and that's the kind of work that we're going to

do going forward: creating the conditions for business to come to Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I think we all found it rather concerning when the Premier, after winning the Liberal leadership, indicated she wanted to continue the Dalton McGuinty legacy. I sense that Ontarians are looking for change. They're looking for a bold new path that says Ontario can actually lead again, that we can be the leaders in Canada, but I'm hearing a lot of the same Dalton McGuinty talking points that we heard four months ago when we last met.

I want to ask the Premier again, to make sure that I understand—you've abandoned the wage freeze. Can you point out, specifically in your throne speech, one policy from Dalton McGuinty that you reject, one Dalton McGuinty spending program that you are going to reverse or eliminate? How are you going to balance the budget if you keep going down the Dalton McGuinty path?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'm going to say what I've been saying publicly for the last couple of weeks: I have been a proud member of a government for the last nine years that has repaired damage that was done by the party opposite, a party that closed hospitals, a party that—

Applause.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you. There's so much to say here—a party that undermined our publicly funded education system, a party that undermined our public health system, and a party that did not pay attention to the needs of the people in this province.

I am not abandoning the work that our government has done for nine years. We are now at a point where we are going to move forward. I am going to build on those strengths and I am going to make sure that our education system, our health care system and our care of the vulnerable are part of a fiscally responsible government going forward.

JOB CREATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Let me first, on behalf of New Democrats—if I can get a second—congratulate the Premier. Premier Wynne, congratulations on your victory and on taking your place in this House for question period.

Now to my question: Ontarians have been waiting a long time for us to get back to business here, and one of the biggest challenges that's facing many of them is finding a job. We've made it clear that we prefer to reward companies when they put young people to work and not when they shift profits out of the province. We heard a lot of promises in the throne speech, but can the Premier explain what tax loopholes she plans to close, when she plans to close them and whether there will be new programs to tackle youth unemployment or just more of

the same old status quo that's left 16% of our young people out of work?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you for the question from the leader of the third party. I am, as I have said consistently, looking forward to working with the opposition. I had hoped that we would be able to work with both parties, and I still hold out that hope. Hope springs eternal.

To the question about the corporate tax compliance issue that we raised in the throne speech yesterday and the youth unemployment programs: As you know, Mr. Speaker, I believe the budget consultations are beginning tonight, and we are going to be talking with people across the province about their concerns and about the specifics that they would like to share with us about how we need to go forward.

We've laid some very clear directions. We've said very clearly that we want to look at those corporate tax compliance issues. That's what's happening now. We've also said that we want to work on youth unemployment. And the specific programs, Mr. Speaker? That's the stuff of the discussion going forward.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: For people looking for work, the details actually matter. They matter quite a lot. The throne speech indicated that the Premier is ready to increase the employer health tax exemption to help small business. Is the Premier ready to actually close the loophole, however, that allows some of the largest corporations in the province to use an exemption that, in fact, was designed for small business?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think the issues that the leader of the third party raises are issues that need to be looked at. That's part of the discussion that we need to have going forward. What I know, if we talk about youth unemployment—to go back to her first question—is that young people are looking for jobs and there's often a mismatch between the labour force and the labour market. I want to make sure—and I think the leader of the third party does as well, and I would hope the Leader of the Opposition—that young people have a pathway into work, whether that's through an internship or whether it's through a co-op or a placement of some kind, and that we can work with the colleges, with the universities, with the skilled trades, with labour and with business to provide a systematic way to provide those opportunities for young people.

1050

That's the kind of discussion that I would like to have going forward with the members of the opposition, but also with the people of Ontario, because I know that there are ideas out there. There are people who already know programs that exist, and we need to tap into those ideas.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I've said it before and I'll say it again: We need a little less discussion and a lot more action—a little less conversation and a lot more action.

Young people are not going to be young forever, Speaker, and that's the reality.

But the Premier's current fiscal plan also includes a new loophole that's about to take place in 2015. That's going to hand Ontario's largest corporations a tax break when they expense meals and entertainment. All told, these loopholes will cost the public over \$1 billion.

We've been pretty clear: When thousands and thousands of young people are out of a job, tax breaks for wining and dining clients should not be the priority here in Ontario. Is the Premier going to stick with her planned giveaway for 2015 or is she ready to offer some real change that will create jobs for youth?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: In terms of what's needed right now, I think we actually do need to make sure that the people of the province have the opportunity to have input on the throne speech and on the run-up to the budget. I would have thought that the leader of the third party would have wanted that, would have wanted us to have an opportunity to talk with the people of Ontario about the specifics.

I recognize that there are young people who are looking for jobs. I recognize that we need to get on that file. It's something that is a high priority for me.

The other issue that she's raised about the corporate tax compliance—those are the things that the Minister of Finance is looking at. We've already said that we are interested in looking at those concerns and we are engaged in that.

JOB CREATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, my next question is to the Premier as well. The people who make this province work every day have been waiting a long time for MPPs to get back to business here. Now that we're here, we owe it to them to deliver some positive change and some results. We've put forward a very achievable plan that will help companies that want to help put young people back to work instead of handing tax breaks to companies that want to shift taxes out of the province or want to write off the sales tax on dinners and drinks.

Is the Premier ready to move beyond the conversation and take some action for the people of this province?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Yes, I am. I'm willing to move beyond the conversation, but I think we have to have the conversation.

I'm so pleased to be back in the House, and we got here in record time. I know that there was an eagerness to get back. They said that we couldn't get back in three weeks, and here we are.

I am committed to working; I am committed to moving into action. But we need to have those pre-budget discussions. We need to make sure that we hear from the people of the province on specifics. We need to make sure that the suggestions that are being put forward by the opposition and suggestions that are being put forward by my caucus can be fine-tuned and that we can make sure that we come up with the right answers and the right

programs. That's why we're going to take some time, as we lead up to the budget, to have those discussions.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Gee, I don't know who the heck the Liberals have been talking to for the last four or five years, but New Democrats have been talking to Ontarians who want some real action on jobs and fairness in this province. Young people are looking for work or being forced to wait years to start their career. They don't want vague promises; they want a job.

We've put forward an achievable plan that will start putting people back to work this spring. Is the Premier ready to implement it, or can we expect the same old status-quo ideas that have left 16% of our young people in this province out of work?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Since the recession, we have more than 400,000 net new jobs in this province. That is a very, very strong record of achievement. So the work that we've been doing over the last few years has actually created jobs. Whether we talk about infrastructure spending or the Second Career Program, we have put in place very, very strong supports for helping people get into the job market.

But there's more to be done. We absolutely acknowledge that there's more to be done, and youth employment is a very specific targeted area. So those are the things that we are going to work on. We're going to work on putting programs in place for youth employment. We're going to work with small business, and the leader of the third party has talked about the employer health tax exemption. We're going to work on that. We're going to put in place new venture capital that will allow small and medium enterprises to have access to capital to create jobs. And, Mr. Speaker, we are going to continue to invest in infrastructure and transit. Those are all things that are going to continue to create jobs, and I look forward to working with the opposition on that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I really do appreciate that the Premier has not been on the job all that long, but the people of Ontario have been waiting a very long time. We owe it to them to go beyond the vague promises and get down to actually delivering results ASAP. That means the Premier is going to have to make some real decisions and some real choices. Is she going to move forward with plans to open tax loopholes to help corporations with entertainment expenses, or is she ready to move forward with plans to open opportunity for young people and reward the companies that are ready to work with us to do that?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, we're going to be looking at all of those issues, and I think that the leader of the third party understands that. The directions that we laid out in the throne speech yesterday made it very clear that those are all issues that are of concern to us and that we are going to develop plans to implement changes in those areas because we know that people do need to know that there's action coming. They need to

know that we're going to take action in the budget on those very issues, and between now and the budget there are things that we can do.

I have already said, Mr. Speaker, that we are ready to make an investment in the venture capital fund. I have already said that we are going to be working on issues around the Ontario Brain Institute and that we are going to be making those investments. So we will not wait for the budget, Mr. Speaker, to take some action, but we will move to action as we move into the budget discussions.

POWER PLANTS

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is for the Premier. On February 14, Premier, you publicly announced that you were prepared to call a select committee to get to the bottom of the gas plant scandal. Premier, can you inform this House whether you had asked for any strings to be attached to this committee?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, my understanding is that the opposition has made another choice, that they have chosen to send the issue that was raised this morning to a standing committee. So my hope is that they certainly will support the establishment of all of those standing committees.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Mr. Speaker, we still don't really have an answer. The Premier has publicly committed to getting to the bottom of the gas plant scandal by striking a select committee. However, there's a discrepancy between what the Premier is telling Ontarians and what she's telling the opposition. Publicly, the Premier is saying she wants to strike a committee, but privately she's telling us that she wants us to withdraw our privilege motion before she does that.

Premier, you can't bargain your way out of this mess. You can't compromise the interests of taxpayers in a partisan way with this, and neither will we. Premier, can you tell Ontarians you're serious about getting to the bottom of this scandal by striking a select committee with no strings attached?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. I was listening carefully, and I was deciding whether or not to interrupt immediately. I will caution all members of making comments around the way in which one might be called to order by the Speaker regarding what you say about another member in the House. So I think I went around the same way you went around it, and hopefully we will refrain from doing so.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I will certainly let the House leader, in future questions, deal with this because, obviously, the House leader has been part of these conversations.

But I just want to make it clear, Mr. Speaker, that I have said that the questions that are being raised by the opposition need answers. I have said that we will do everything in our power to provide opportunities for those questions to be answered. I have said that I will

appear before committees if I am asked to appear before a committee. I have said that we offered to set up a select committee.

The opposition has chosen a different route. The opposition has chosen to take another route and to have the discussion in a standing committee. I offered a select committee; they took a different route. I hope they will at least support the establishment of all the standing committees when that motion is raised.

1100

INSURANCE RATES

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question is for the Premier. Does the government have a plan to give safe drivers in Ontario a break by actually ensuring that insurance rates in Ontario are cut?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Thank you. Before I begin, I'd just like to congratulate the Premier on a well-run campaign and on putting forth a positive vision for the province of Ontario, which brings me to your question.

We want to continue remaining positive in terms of what we need to do going forward. We've implemented the recommendations of the anti-fraud task force on auto insurance, and that's essential. We need to get to the root cause of the problem. Certainly in Ontario things are much more expensive than they are in other parts of Canada, so we have to ensure what we do going forward enables us to reduce the overall cost so that we can again provide better rates going forward.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Well, the issue is this: For two years, drivers in Ontario have been told that rates will be coming down. For two years, they've been told that rates would be coming down. But what has happened is that rates have gone up instead. Industry figures have shown that we've already addressed the costs. In fact, from 2010, policy changes by this government have saved insurance companies in this province \$2 billion in the year 2011; \$2 billion of savings have already come forward. But the issue is that at the same time, our premiums have gone up by 5%. So the issue is this: We are now being told that we have to wait for more reforms—more reforms—until drivers can see some savings and their premiums coming down. That's simply unacceptable. It's time for results.

At a time when millions of Ontarians are struggling to make ends meet, will this government act to ensure that rates actually come down and that those savings—those \$2 billion of savings—are passed on to drivers in Ontario?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Well, the fact is that in 2012, rates decreased by 0.2%, and our plan has started to work.

Interjection.

Hon. Charles Sousa: But it has. What we do need to do going forward is to ensure that we do protect our

ratepayers. We know that things have been difficult, but something is wrong in that there's so much that appears to be excess cost in our system. We have to get at that root cause, and the report brought forward talks about how to do just that. We can't make this a band-aid solution. We have to get at the issues, and I welcome your input to enable us to get at that resolve. So I will commit to doing just that going forward, and I do say that some of the transformations we've put forward have already resulted in the stabilization of some of those rates, but more needs to be done.

FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN

Mr. Bob Delaney: This question is to the Minister of Education. New parents in western Mississauga are concerned about the education of their youngest children. To compete in the knowledge-based economy of the future, we have to be innovative in our approach to education and early learning. Parents need their children to have access to a high quality of education as soon as possible, and parents need to know their children are in the best possible environment to ensure their future success.

Minister, please tell this House what your ministry has done to ensure that young Ontarians will be able to compete in the highly competitive global economy of the future.

Hon. Liz Sandals: I want to thank the member from Mississauga—Streetsville for his question—my very first question—and thank him for his advocacy on behalf of the students and schools in his riding.

I just want to assure everyone that part of the Wynne government's commitment to the parents of Ontario is that we will continue the rollout of full-day kindergarten. We know that's the most important transformation in our school system in a generation and we know it's working. In fact, Speaker, there's an initial study from the University of Toronto looking at those first enrolments in full-day kindergarten, and it says they are succeeding.

I want to say to everyone, I am so pleased to be in this role, coming full circle with my history in education, and I look forward to working with everybody here in the House, including my critics.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Bob Delaney: Thank you very much, Minister. I'm sure the minister, as did I, watched President Obama's State of the Union address last week in which the United States realized that for their own youngest learners, they need full-day kindergarten. So as the United States copies Ontario, we realize that full-day kindergarten is an important step in long-term education planning, and we are at the forefront here in Ontario.

Minister, moms and dads want their children to become life-long learners, and some people are concerned about the immediate impact full-day kindergarten will have on child care. Many parents have been accustomed to leaving their children at daycare centres or at other facilities. Minister, what will full-day kindergarten mean for child care in neighbourhoods in western Mississauga?

saga such as Lisgar, Meadowvale and Streetsville, and across Ontario?

Hon. Liz Sandals: As the member correctly notes, full-day kindergarten will in fact have an impact on other parts of our early education system. We recognize that FDK will have an impact on child care, and that's exactly why we have already announced additional funding to support the transition to a modernized child care system here in Ontario.

Full-day learning is the best start that we can give our 4- and 5-year-olds, and what we're going to continue to do is to roll it out, which is in contrast to the official opposition, which can't quite decide whether they're for it, whether they're against it, whether they're cancelling it. We're not quite sure what they're going to do from day to day.

But we know what we're going to do, and because we are committed to rolling out full-day kindergarten, that also means that we need to work on child care. We will be working on child care with our partners. We put in place new funding, last year, this year, next year, all of it focused on making sure the child care system can adjust.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. I want to make a comment about the decorum. It's a concern that I have and I'm going to state it now. Some people, when they stand to speak—I've heard, because I'm trying to pay attention to the question but also pay attention to what's going on in the House, personalized comments about someone's position or someone's place in this place and their abilities. That does not help this place. I want it to stop and I will deal with it if I hear it again.

New question.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, my question is for the Premier. Premier, may I begin by offering my congratulations to you as well.

This morning, we heard two point-of-privilege motions. According to our standing orders, Speaker, they had to be brought out at the first possible opportunity or become null. They dealt strictly with the contempt issues pertaining to ordered documents not being turned over to this Legislature.

Premier, at this point, I'd like to speak about a completely separate matter: the issue of the actual cancellation of the gas plants. In your letter to our leader, you promised to strike a select committee to "get to the bottom" of the gas plant story. Premier, when will you strike this committee?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think I've already answered this question, Mr. Speaker. What I said was that we were offering to strike a select committee. The opposition chose a different route, and they are going to have this discussion in a different venue. I would have thought that a select committee would have been a very good way to answer the questions that have been raised by the official opposition. As I say, they've chosen to take an-

other route. That is their prerogative, but it is their choice and they have made that decision, Mr. Speaker.

1110

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I fail to see how one has to do with the other, so let me reiterate: The two point-of-privilege motions are to determine who ordered the documents not to be produced.

Speaker, in your original ruling, you stated, "The right to order production of documents is fundamental to and necessary for proper functioning of the assembly." That is one issue.

The issue I'm now referring to is a completely separate issue. It's the Premier's promise to investigate the actual gas plant scandal through her promise to form a select committee. So I repeat my question: When will you form that select committee to investigate the gas plant scandal?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the House leader, Mr. Speaker.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order, please.

First of all, let's just keep it down. Second of all, I'll do my job. I don't need other people to tell me when it's too loud. You can all hear when it's too loud.

Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: I think it's important that we put on the record there's no surprise here. In fact, if members opposite had heard my comments this morning, I made it very clear. We sat down with the opposition, we acknowledged the concern over the gas plants issue, and we said there were two possible ways to go forward. One was through a select committee of the Legislature which would have a wide berth and could come back to the Legislature with what we felt was a useful report. The other, Mr. Speaker, was to follow up on what, quite frankly, was a vindictive and mean-spirited attack on a private citizen, a former member of the Legislature.

The choice was left with the opposition, Mr. Speaker, and this morning, a little after 9 a.m., they made their choice.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Well, actually, that's perfect timing for the question, but I will tell the member from Simcoe—Grey to come to order.

HOME CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée.

I have a simple question this morning: Will the minister and her government take the needs of more than 6,000 Ontarians seriously and implement a five-day home care guarantee so that timely care can be delivered in every community of Ontario?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I am delighted to have that question from my critic from the third party. Enhancing home care is a foundational and key part—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of the Environment, come to order.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: —of the transformation of health care. We have made difficult decisions within our health care budget so that we can invest more in home care. We know that there are too many people in hospital who could be at home with appropriate care. We know that too many people are moving into long-term care before they really need to, that they could be supported at home.

So our seniors strategy and our action plan have as foundational elements the enhancement of home care. We are clearly moving in that direction. We've reduced wait times from 13 days to nine days for people being discharged from hospital. We are moving in that direction, and I'm delighted to have the support of the NDP in that initiative.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Yesterday in the throne speech, we saw reference to the problem, but for people waiting for home care, they need to see solutions. Today, some Ontarians have to wait up to six months for home care. I think that this is unacceptable.

Can the minister assure Ontarians that yesterday's reference in the throne speech, as well as the importance that they have given home care, will translate into results, and that the result would be a home-care warranty to ensure people get home care within five days?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I think it's important to clarify that there is no wait time for people who have acute needs and who are being discharged from hospital. They will get home care immediately.

I referenced a statistic, and I'll clarify it right now: If they're already in the community, the wait time has gone from 13 days to nine days. And because of our enhanced investments in home care, we will continue to see that number decline.

It's very important that we provide the right care in the right place at the right time. We need to get people back home when they are ready to go home, with the right supports, and as I said earlier, I am delighted that the NDP and our party are on the very same page when it comes to enhancing supports.

LABOUR POLICY

Mr. Steven Del Duca: My question today is for the Minister of Labour. I want to begin by congratulating the minister on his recent appointment to cabinet. I know he'll do a fantastic job for the people of Ontario.

Minister, it seems to me that the new labour policies that have been developed in Michigan recently have stirred up quite a bit of trouble. I've heard that their state Legislature and the grounds of their Legislature were full of protesters warning of the terrible trouble that these policies would have on that state's economy.

Now, I understand that the Ontario PCs have issued multiple papers outlining their thoughts on various policy issues and that they've actually introduced one on this

particular subject. It is this PC labour scheme that has my constituents in Vaughan worried. When they hear phrases like "right to work," they are concerned that the extreme right-wing policies of the United States are making their way to Canada, and they're reminded of President Obama's wise comment that workers are actually being given the right to work for less.

My constituents tell me that they're worried that these schemes will lower their wages and have an adverse effect on their families and on our economy. Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister, how does our government's approach differ from the official opposition's interest in the right to work for less?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Stop the clock. I will use this as an opportunity to provide somewhat of a warning regarding policy questions directly. The preamble was setting the table for a possible question and it's very edgy as to whether or not it was a direct response to government policy, so I'll remind all members that your question should be based on government policy.

Minister of Labour.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker.
Applause.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you. I want to thank the member for Vaughan for asking a very important question and thank the member for Vaughan for his work on occupational work and safety and safety of our workers and for progressive labour relations in our province.

And the member is right, Speaker: Michigan has taken drastic steps against labour, and with great controversy. In doing so, they are jeopardizing fair wages, health and safety and quality of life for their workers.

We have seen similar proposals from the opposition in that regard, and changes are being articulated to the Ontario Labour Relations Act through this party. Speaker, I have to say that their position is disturbing, in a sense, because instead of talking about collaboration, working with our labour partners, what we've seen is a "divide" policy—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. While I said that about the question, the same holds true about the answer. Get focused on policy, please.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you, Speaker. And I think it is important that the policies they're talking about are policies that are in place in our laws and our rules and regulations, policies around the Rand formula, which was implemented province-wide in the 1980s by the Progressive Conservative Premier Bill Davis.

Speaker, these policies ensure that we have fair wages in our province, that we are not having a race to the bottom. We need to ensure that that continues. Thank you very much, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Now that I've given that warning I'll be listening intently to both the question and the answer for policy.

Supplementary.

Mr. Steven Del Duca: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, through you, to the minister for that answer.

I do certainly find it very interesting that there are people in Ontario currently who seem to be calling for the reversal of some important legislation that had been previously implemented by a Progressive Conservative Premier, Bill Davis.

Minister, it seems to me and it seems to the people of my community that we here in Ontario are in a very good position. Our economy has recovered more than 100% of the jobs lost during the last recession. Our minimum wage has increased—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I have to hear the question.

Mr. Steven Del Duca: —by almost 50% since 2003 after nine consecutive years of zero increases—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): And I don't like to have to say it again.

Mr. Steven Del Duca: —and our government has built up and maintained a high standard of living for all Canadians.

Again, some seem convinced bringing in certain types of schemes will increase wages and bring jobs to the province, but I understand that the preferred option for those individuals would actually do the opposite.

Minister, in general, what has the experience been for states that have implemented such regressive policies?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That's not acceptable.

New question.

POWER PLANTS

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: If I may first congratulate the Premier and let her know I'm wearing a pantsuit in her honour today. The women in this chamber are allowed to do that.

1120

My question is to the Premier. On September 25, you told this chamber that the opposition had all the documents pertaining to the cancelled gas plants. Your House leader told us we had the documents, your community safety minister told us we had the documents, your new Minister of Energy told us we had the documents, but the OPA proved that we didn't. They engaged in an elaborate scheme of hide-and-seek to withhold documents from this side of the assembly, and now this Premier is paying lip service to the very transparency that she told us she was going to give us with a select committee. There must be explosive information in those documents.

My question: Will she cut the strings that are attached to her promise and her commitment? Will she release the documents, and will she tell us what she knew and when she knew it with respect to these cancelled gas plants?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: At any particular moment when I have stood in this Legislature or I have stood in public and I have made a statement about what I know or what I don't know, I have told the truth as I understand it. I have honestly given all the information that I have, and

I have said that I will appear before the committee if I am called on.

We have said repeatedly that the decisions that were made early on—I have said that I regret that we had not been able to make a different decision at the front end of that decision around the placement of the gas plants. I regret that that process was not better, leading up to the placement of those gas plants. But I have also said—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew, come to order—second time.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —that any questions that the opposition is asking, we are going to do everything in our power to provide the answers to those questions, to provide the documents that they're asking for. We've said that we will do that. That's why I offered a select committee, Mr. Speaker. They've taken another path—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Speaker, if she wanted to provide the documents, she'd do that right now. If she wanted to provide transparency, she'd have that select committee struck this week. If she cared about telling Ontarians the truth, she'd do it right now. But she hasn't.

There are five indisputable facts. This member, this Premier, was a Liberal MPP for nine years. For seven years, she sat in the McGuinty cabinet. She rose quickly to become the campaign chair of the campaign team that decided to cancel those power plants to a cost of a billion dollars to our taxpayers, and she hand-picked the biggest beneficiary of that cancelled power plant, made him her finance minister and sat him beside her. Mr. Speaker, that's not all. She came to this assembly telling us she'd work with us, and now all we see is further obstruction.

Will she cut the strings for that select committee? Will she call it this week? And will we get the answers to know what she knew and when she knew it, so Ontarians can finally put this issue to bed?

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I have every faith in our House leader's ability to negotiate the waters of this discussion. But because this is the first day in the Legislature, and because these questions are coming at me today, I want to establish my approach to this, which has been to say from the beginning that I am committed to being open and transparent. I am committed to providing the information in the documents. That's why I asked the Auditor General to look at both cases. That's why we offered a select committee. That's why I said I would appear before the committee.

I will do everything in my power, but we cannot do that alone. We have to have a partner to work with, and the opposition has to make choices that will allow us to get to the bottom of the questions that they're asking. If they really want the information, then they need to provide the opportunities for that information to come out.

They've made a choice; it's not a choice that I understand. I thought that they would have wanted to have a select committee, but they've made another choice, and I don't think having redundancy is valuable. They've made a choice, and so they will have to—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

New question.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. Two weeks ago, families in Windsor learned that they will be losing 30 beds at the Windsor Regional Hospital, and 58 much-needed new beds, which the government promised for Windsor families more than a year ago, will never open. Furthermore, 34 nurses are going to be losing their jobs. The hospital CEO said this wouldn't be necessary if the Liberal government would deliver the funding that they had already promised.

Is the Premier serious about keeping her word, or are families in Windsor who need care in the hospital simply going to have to deal with another Liberal broken promise?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The earlier question from the health critic of the third party referred to enhanced spending on home care. We are absolutely committed to spending more on home care. What that means, however, is that we're having to hold the line in other parts of our health care system. So whether it's physician compensation—I'm very pleased that we achieved a ratified agreement with the OMA to hold physician compensation in line. I was very pleased that we were able to reduce the price of generic drugs so we could spend more on home care.

Hospitals are also doing their part. We have held hospitals to a 0% base funding increase. That does mean that hospitals right across this province are making choices about what services they can provide in the hospital and what can be provided in the community.

There is a transformation under way in health care; it will result in better health care for all.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, I guess that was a yes. The Liberal word is as good as it's ever been here in the province of Ontario.

Only last week, families in London learned that services at St. Joseph's health care centre would be cut. Wait times for MRIs, PET scans, CTs and ultrasounds will go up, and 59 health care workers will lose their jobs.

And while the throne speech made promises to increase accessibility to mental health services, 80 people with mental health challenges will lose job training programs in St. Thomas.

Making promises is easy, Speaker, but keeping them is the real hard work. Will the Premier keep the promises she made only yesterday in the throne speech, or will

families in London, Ontario, face longer wait times and more broken Liberal promises?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I think it's important that all of us in this Legislature understand that there are decisions that are being made in our health care system that will result in programs moving from hospitals to the community.

The leader of the third party has discussed withdrawing of services for mental health patients. That is simply not accurate, and I think it's important that we all get our facts right. Will those services be provided to patients? Yes, they will. Will they be provided by the hospital? No, they won't. It's more appropriate that they're delivered in the community by organizations that do a very, very fine job, Speaker.

I think it's important to note that we've increased hospital funding province-wide by 50% over the past 10 years. We're spending a lot more on our hospitals. We are at a time of transformation now, where more services are moving to the community, where they belong.

YOUTH SERVICES

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: I rise in this inaugural question period to pose an important question to the Minister of Children and Youth Services on a subject that is not only important for my riding of Etobicoke North but across the GTA and beyond.

I appreciate and sense on the ground that our government has made significant progress with regard to crime and youth engagement. Two measures illustrate this: The overall youth crime rate in Ontario is 23% lower than a decade ago; and number two, the youth violent crime rate is also down by 17% over the same period—better than the national rate.

However, many youth continue to face significant challenges and barriers to success, gainful employment and engagement. The recent tragic shootings of our youngest Ontarians, in my riding and elsewhere, compel us, urge us and inform us that there is more work to be done.

This past summer, our government announced the Youth Action Plan to give youth the support they need to make positive life choices. Speaker, I ask on behalf of my community and others: What are the results of this plan?

1130

Hon. Teresa Piruzza: I thank the member from Etobicoke North for his question. Before I go on with respect to the Youth Action Plan, let me say that my heart truly goes out and I'm saddened whenever I hear of the stories and read the stories in the media of youth who have lost their lives to violence in their neighbourhoods.

Speaker, we have made significant progress since the announcement of the Youth Action Plan. We worked with community, business and youth leaders to recommend actions to make communities safer and provide opportunities. We are giving youth the support and opportunities they need to make positive choices. The plan

provides for a wide range of programs and initiatives that improve outcomes in education, employment, health and well-being.

To that end, Speaker, we have created 17 new parenting and literacy centres across the province. We are providing approximately \$1 million in funding to 32 community projects. We are providing after-school programs in Toronto and other neighbourhoods in York, Halton, Peel and Durham. With these initiatives—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Shafiq Qadri: Merci, monsieur le Président. Je voudrais vous remercier, madame la Ministre, pour votre réponse. I know that these initiatives which involve centres, projects, after-school activities and supervision will have a positive impact on youth across this province. I know we strive to provide the opportunities they need to make more salutary choices in their lives.

But the tragic events that we are unfortunately forced to witness and see unfold in our communities, especially over these last few weeks, are an urgent reminder to this Parliament. The question of youth engagement, crime and better futures is multi-factorial. There are no easy answers or explanations about the youth violence that we have witnessed. I ask the minister: What more will be done moving forward with the Youth Action Plan to tackle the roots of youth violence?

Hon. Teresa Piruzza: I again thank the member from Etobicoke North for his continued advocacy on this issue.

Speaker, I agree with the statement that he made, and that is that there's more work to be done. As we continue to implement our Youth Action Plan, the number of youth outreach workers in the province will increase from 62 to 97, including 29 additional workers in Toronto and the GTA. Our Summer Jobs for Youth Program will expand to provide over 440 additional new part-time, after-school jobs.

The plan also calls for sustained commitment. We are committed to continuing to engage and listen to valuable feedback from our communities. As we indicated in the throne speech yesterday, we will be establishing a Premier's Youth Advisory Council. The Premier's council will be a new, permanent body that will advise government on how to better target existing programs and any new directions that could be pursued.

Through our Youth Action Plan, we are helping to make a real difference to youth across this province, and we will continue to work with our partners to keep our communities safe and support our children and youth.

MEMBERS' PRIVILEGES

Mr. Todd Smith: My congratulations as well to the new Premier.

My question is to the new Premier. One hundred and twenty-eight days ago seems like a long time ago now, but it's the last time we had question period in this House. Only two of your ministers did the honourable thing. They rose to correct their record about knowingly

false statements that they made here in the House. We know—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That is not factual, and I'll ask the member to withdraw that.

Mr. Todd Smith: I withdraw that.

However, Minister, you and countless of your ministers, including the Deputy Premier, the Minister of Children and Youth Services, the Minister of Consumer Services, the Minister of Research and Innovation, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and many, many others have yet to do the honourable thing and correct their record.

Premier, a new House—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock for a second. As I did with the other members about policy, as we now have an active point of privilege taking place, the question needs to be germane to policy. I'll listen carefully that it gets done that way.

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm just wondering if anything has changed on the other side of the House. They talk a lot about change on the other side of the House, but Minister—sorry, Premier—will you be holding your ministers to account or will you allow such inexcusable conduct to continue, as the last government did?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that the first part of the member's question has been dealt with by a point of privilege. This morning, I had the opportunity to provide an explanation to the Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's a little more than passing strange that today, on the first day of the return of the House, when there are issues in this province about health care, about education, about jobs and the economy, that instead what we're hearing from the opposition are mean and vindictive attacks, attacks against a former member of the Legislature, and raising a point of privilege of which an explanation has already been provided to this Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Todd Smith: I can't believe that this Premier is going to allow this unaccountability to continue. We're seeing the same dog-and-pony show that we saw from the previous government, where the Premier would kick questions over to the House leader.

Clearly the House leader has brought up some good points. Yes, there are serious concerns in all of our ridings, whether it comes to green energy, whether it comes to our health care or our hospitals. I have serious concerns in Prince Edward County, as we've just heard from Windsor and London as well. But when a government is wasting \$1.3 billion on a scandal, and then has strings attached to how they're doing deals behind the scenes—we want openness and accountability from that side of the House, and we're not seeing it right now. Instead, you're kicking questions over to the government House leader, just like your predecessor did.

Will you require the ministers who stood in the House after September 27, when the OPA clearly told the ministry—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Question.

Mr. Todd Smith: —that they knew they hadn't turned over all the documents, yet all of these ministers—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I think the best explanation is the letter from the Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Energy. It was sent at the time when additional documents came forward, and I quote from that letter: "The ministry's search to identify and produce all documents responsive to the May 16, 2012, motion was conducted in good faith with every intention to comply with the committee's motion. No responsive information or documents were deliberately withheld from the September 24 package." Mr. Speaker, an error was made. Individuals operated in good faith, and the additional documents were brought forward.

But again, I think when we look at the province of Ontario and the issues that I hear about from constituents in terms of health care, in terms of education, in terms of jobs and the economy, I think most of them will be shocked to know that the official opposition is on a combination of a vindictive, mean-spirited fishing trip—the combination of the two here in the Legislature—instead of dealing with the issues which are of concern to my constituents and to the people of Ontario.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We have a special guest in the west members' gallery in the name of former member of provincial Parliament David Turnbull from York Mills, 35th and 36th Parliaments, and Don Valley West, 37th Parliament. Welcome.

There are no deferred votes. This House stands adjourned until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1138 to 1500.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

EUGENE WHELAN

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I rise today, but I cannot say that I'm pleased to do so.

Eugene Whelan, a former Minister of Agriculture and senator, passed away Tuesday evening in his home in Amherstburg, alongside family and loved ones, at the age of 88.

Mr. Whelan always made time for his constituents, so let us take a moment to give our respects to a man that made such a profound impact on his community and country.

The man beneath the trademark green stetson was first elected to the local school board at age 21. He later

became reeve and warden of Essex county before entering Parliament in 1962.

He then managed to win seven consecutive re-elections—I think we can all appreciate just how difficult that achievement was. It also demonstrates how much Mr. Whelan meant to his community. He knew many constituents by name, was blunt and honest, and deeply cared for all members of his riding. He served many and will be missed by many.

As Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Whelan carved out his legacy. In an article written in Maclean's magazine back in 1974, he was described as a man instinctively, firmly and forever on the side of the farmer. He would serve in this role from 1972 to 1979 and, after a brief interruption, again from 1980 to 1984.

At a time when the Liberal government's relationship with rural Canada was less than ideal, Mr. Whelan became a constant voice of the farmer and for all rural Canadians.

His years of work demonstrated that, regardless of political stripe, we're all here to serve. A representative incarnate, it is to Eugene Whelan's standard that we should all measure ourselves.

I speak on behalf of our entire PC caucus when I say: Thank you, Mr. Whelan, for your dedication and service to the people of Essex. You were an inspiration to us all in this House, and you will be missed.

My sincere condolences to the Eugene Whelan family.

EUGENE WHELAN

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I, too, rise today on a solemn note to pay tribute and my respects, through this chamber on the recent news of the passing of former member of Parliament for Essex South, Minister of Agriculture and senator, Eugene Whelan.

Senator Whelan was the quintessential people's politician who brought local issues to the national stage with his hometown charm and his friendly demeanour. Always donning his trademark green stetson, Eugene was easily identifiable in a crowd, approachable and generous with his time.

His political career spanned over four decades, having served at both municipal and federal levels in a variety of capacities, most notably as a voice for rural Canadians as the Minister of Agriculture.

During the era of the Trudeau Liberals, Whelan was their guy in rural and small-town Canada. Gene spoke the language of farmers. During his career, he would meet Queen Elizabeth, help Canada beat US President Richard Nixon to the punch in opening up China, and play a catalyzing role in the fall of the Iron Curtain and the end of the Cold War. As a federal cabinet minister, he helped successive Liberal governments usher in medicare and repatriate the Constitution. He also played an instrumental role in developing Canada's agricultural supply management system and sat on the UN's world food committee.

Mr. Speaker, I offer my deep condolences to Eugene's family: his wife, Elizabeth; daughters Theresa, Susan and Cathy. I want to thank them, on behalf of the Ontario New Democratic Party, for sharing him with Canadians for so long. We are indeed a better country because of his service.

COURAGE POLAR BEAR DIP

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Every year on January 1, thousands of people descend on Coronation Park in Oakville. The crowds are there to cheer on hundreds of people who have decided that the best way and the only way to ring in a new year is to jump into the ice-cold waters of Lake Ontario. The polar bear dip for World Vision is a growing community tradition. It's been organized by the Courage brothers, Todd and Trent.

The first dip was organized by the brothers 28 years ago and it actually started out as a simple suggestion from their mother, whose name is Gaye. She was tired of hearing Todd and Trent complaining they had nothing to do on New Year's Day, so Gaye suggested that they simply go and jump in the lake, which they proceeded to do. I don't think she knew what she was starting. Her suggestion now has led to Canada's largest polar bear dip and the brothers now have partnered with World Vision to build clean water projects all around the world.

This year's dip saw 700 people jumping in. It helped raise more than \$120,000 for projects in Africa. This year's success helped the dip surpass the \$1-million milestone for World Vision.

I'd like to extend my congratulations to the Courage brothers for organizing a fun community event that helps thousands of people in some of the world's less fortunate areas.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. Michael Harris: Today I rise to remind the environment minister of the need to conduct a more extensive review of Hydro One's project to construct a transformer station on the pristine and environmentally sensitive countryside of the Oak Ridges moraine. This project, like any other, needs to be guided by science. As such, my colleague John O'Toole and I have written to the minister and met with officials from Hydro One to express a number of concerns with the project's proposed location on top of a critically important aquifer that supplies drinking water to 200,000 Ontarians.

The principal concern that the member for Durham and I have raised is that the site's water table is, on average, 1.8 metres below grade, while the proposed cut to install the transformers is seven metres. I would like to remind the minister that when the water table is higher than the proposed cut, there is the potential for significant environmental damage in the event of a chemical spill, similar to the one that occurred at the Cherrywood transformer. And when we're dealing with a source of drink-

ing water for hundreds of thousands of Ontarians, we should be taking all precautions necessary.

Now, I have not received a response to my letter about this matter but I would like to again call on the minister to do the right thing by approving a part II order request for a full individual environmental assessment of the proposed site for the Clarington transformer station.

PILLAR NONPROFIT NETWORK

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to share with the members of this Legislature an amazing awards event I attended in my community: the Pillar Community Innovation Awards.

Firstly, I want to congratulate Pillar Nonprofit Network for their dedication to supporting the non-profit organizations in my city of London. While they support the non-profits of London, I want to ensure they know that we appreciate the work they do.

The Pillar Nonprofit Network actively engages London's non-profit community by supporting the hard work achieved by our non-profit groups. Supporting non-profits is challenging work, especially in London, where we are facing record-high unemployment and very hard economic times.

Throughout it all, Pillar Nonprofit Network strives to facilitate equitable workplaces that are diverse, inclusive and accessible to everyone. They promote best practices and policies, and also help non-profit organizations to connect with each other as well as the public and private sectors.

The Pillar Community Innovation Awards nominees were individuals who taught students about empowerment, highlighted the need for social responsibility and revitalized our neighbourhoods. I congratulate this year's nominees for their passion and dedication, along with the award winners. People like this make London a better place to live and I, for one, am so proud of their achievements.

Lastly, I thank the Pillar Nonprofit Network for their long-standing commitment to our community.

LENT

Mr. Joe Dickson: Religions and cultures around the world celebrate and worship special times throughout the year, including the holy season of Lent. Other important religious holidays include Eid and Ramadan, celebrated by the Muslim faith; Thai Pongal, celebrated by Tamil Hindus; and gurpurbs, which are festivals marking the birthday or martyrdom of a guru, celebrated, of course, by the Sikhs.

1510

The holy season of Lent has commenced this month for Christian religions, whether Catholic, Protestant or other. It is the penitential season, the time for penance. Lent starts informally with Shrove Tuesday and officially with Ash Wednesday, with the crucifix on your forehead

in ash; Holy Thursday and, of course, Good Friday, which is the crucifixion and death of our Lord; and Holy Saturday, and then Easter Sunday, the resurrection of our Lord. It is the celebration of his life and atonement for sins.

The Feast of the Ascension follows 40 days after Easter. Many of my colleagues from all three parties in this House share this holy time.

Lent is a time of self-denial, with most people not eating between meals and reducing their eating amounts. It is a time also of prayer and almsgiving. It is a time for us in Ontario and Canada to remember those who are hungry and destitute in other parts of the world.

JOHN WISE

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I rise today to pay tribute to a community advocate, beloved family man and dedicated public servant. On January 9, 2013, Canada lost a venerable political figure with the passing of Elgin MP the Honourable John Wise.

John was born on December 12, 1935, and was a successful dairy farmer by trade. However, John was the kind of person who was driven to constantly better his community. This led him to initially enter the world of municipal politics, where he served as councillor and reeve for Yarmouth township and ultimately as warden of Elgin county.

In 1972, John decided to run for and was elected as MP for the riding of Elgin. His knowledge of, and dedication to, agricultural business led Joe Clark to appoint him agricultural minister in 1979, a position he would again serve under Brian Mulroney's government from 1984 to 1988.

John's dedication to public service had a large impact on my own political ambitions. He was a politician that everyone, from all political stripes, respected. He considered public service a duty and took his role as the people's representative very seriously. This outlook has inspired and taught me much about what it means to serve one's community. It is a philosophy that I try to live by every day.

After retirement from politics, John continued to be a tremendous source of advice and guidance to area politicians. I would like to thank Ann, his wife of 54 years, and their daughters Susan and Elizabeth, for sharing John with our community.

Although John was a federal member, his contribution to Elgin county, Ontario and Canada needs to be acknowledged in this chamber. Our country is a better place for having been served by John.

EUGENE WHELAN

Mr. Bob Delaney: Last night, our province and our country lost a great Canadian with the passing of the Honourable Eugene Whelan. He was a wonderful man who spent his life in public service, devoting himself to

bettering, particularly, the lives of Ontario's and Canada's farmers.

First elected in 1962 to the House of Commons, Eugene Whelan served 10 years and five elections before finally getting the job that he sought after above all others, that being Minister of Agriculture. Eugene will be remembered for the way that he embodied the hopes and the dreams and the ideals of Canada's farmers and championed their cause, who stood up for Canada's agricultural community and made sure that their dreams and their needs were reflected in national policy. He opened up international markets to Canadian agricultural products.

Eugene Whelan never forgot his roots, and he helped educate generations of Canadians on the importance of farming and of agriculture. He passed away in his home area of Windsor-Essex at the age of 88.

We will also remember Eugene Whelan for his run for the federal Liberal leadership in 1984.

I know Eugene Whelan will be missed dearly by a family that loved him very much, by his many, many friends and neighbours in Essex county, and by countless generations of farmers whose voices he embodied so ably for so many years.

DALE BLANCHARD

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'm pleased to rise and to share with my fellow members of provincial Parliament a great story from my riding of Lambton-Kent-Middlesex.

In December, at a local arena in Mount Brydges, not far from where my wife and I live, Gary Smits, a teacher at Medway High School, was playing a game of pickup hockey. About halfway through the game, Gary felt a little bit of chest pain and, despite this, he tried to push through and continued to play.

A few seconds after Gary skated back onto the ice for another shift, he passed out. Dale Blanchard, an off-duty Middlesex-London EMS paramedic who was playing the game, obtained the nearby defibrillator, while teammates phoned 911, and began performing CPR. Using the arena's defibrillator, they got Gary's heart beating again.

At age 47, Gary had suffered a heart attack. Doctors told Gary that one of his arteries was almost 80% blocked, and without the quick actions of his teammates, he may not have survived.

On behalf of the people of Lambton-Kent-Middlesex and all of the MPPs here today, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude and appreciation to Dale Blanchard and his teammates for their bravery and quick action, which undoubtedly saved Gary Smits's life.

I'm very proud of the people in my riding and the people of Ontario, who do their best to help their fellow neighbour and contribute to the good of our province and the good of our local communities.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all the members for their statements.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

RESTORING PLANNING POWERS TO MUNICIPALITIES ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR LE RÉTABLISSEMENT DES POUVOIRS DES MUNICIPALITÉS EN MATIÈRE D'AMÉNAGEMENT DU TERRITOIRE

Mr. Wilson moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 2, An Act to amend the Planning Act / Projet de loi 2, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'aménagement du territoire.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Jim Wilson: The bill amends the Planning Act to reverse the effect of the amendments made to the act by schedule K to the Green Energy and Green Economy Act, 2009. Those amendments exempted renewable energy undertakings from the normal application of the Planning Act, including policy statements, provincial plans, official plans, demolition control bylaws, zoning bylaws and development permit regulations and bylaws.

The urgency of this bill is that wpd Canada is proposing the Fairview wind project, that consists of eight turbines in Clearview township on a flight path of the Collingwood airport.

Given that the Premier recently visited the area and has been briefed on the ridiculousness of putting industrial wind turbines as tall as the TD tower near an airport, I trust that the government will take the bill seriously and move to bring it into law.

GASOLINE TAX FAIRNESS FOR ALL ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR L'ÉQUITÉ POUR TOUS À L'ÉGARD DE LA TAXE SUR L'ESSENCE

Mr. Yakabuski moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 3, An Act to amend the Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Act with respect to matching rebates of gasoline tax that the Minister provides to municipalities / Projet de loi 3, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'aménagement des voies publiques et des transports en commun à l'égard des remboursements de la taxe sur l'essence similaires consentis aux municipalités par le ministre.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

1520

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

This is not the first time that the bill has been introduced by me; in fact, it's several.

This bill amends the Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Act. If the minister, under section 116 of the act, enters into an agreement with a municipality to provide a rebate of tax under the Gasoline Tax Act to the municipality for the purpose of constructing, maintaining or operating a rapid transit or public transportation system, the minister shall not refuse to enter into an agreement to provide a rebate of tax under that act to any other municipality for a purpose related to public highways under the jurisdiction of the latter municipality. The amount of the rebate that the latter municipality receives shall be based on the number of inhabitants in the municipality and the total distance of public highways under the jurisdiction of the municipality.

I want to thank the new Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment for already stating that he will be supporting this act.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Request for a motion without notice: Do we have unanimous consent? Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. John Milloy: I move that, notwithstanding standing order 98(a), private members' public business shall not be considered on Thursday, February 21, 2013; and that, notwithstanding standing order 98(g), notice for ballot items 1 through 6, inclusive, be waived.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to move a motion without notice considering the appointment of standing committees, and that the Speaker shall put the question without debate or amendment.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Do we have unanimous consent? Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. John Milloy: You'll have to be patient with me, Mr. Speaker; this is a long one.

I move that, notwithstanding standing order 108 and pursuant to standing order 113, the following standing committees be appointed and that the membership of these committees be as follows:

The Standing Committee on Estimates: Vic Dhillon, Grant Crack, Kim Craitor, Bill Mauro, Michael Harris,

Rob Leone, Rick Nicholls, Taras Natyshak, Michael Prue;

The Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs: Dipika Damerla, Steven Del Duca, Kevin Flynn, Soo Wong, Victor Fedeli, Monte McNaughton, Peter Shurman, Catherine Fife, Michael Prue;

The Standing Committee on General Government: Bas Balkissoon, Rick Bartolucci, Donna Cansfield, Mike Colle, Laurie Scott, Todd Smith, Jeff Yurek, Sarah Campbell, Rosario Marchese;

The Standing Committee on Government Agencies: Laura Albanese, Lorenzo Berardinetti, Joe Dickson, Phil McNeely, Jim McDonell, Randy Pettapiece, Lisa Thompson, Paul Miller, Monique Taylor;

That, notwithstanding the order of the House dated February 20, 2013, the membership of the Standing Committee on Justice Policy shall be as follows: Laura Albanese, Bob Delaney, Steven Del Duca, Shafiq Qaadri, Jack MacLaren, Rob Milligan, Frank Klees, Teresa Armstrong, Jonah Schein;

The Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly: Bas Balkissoon, Mike Colle, Kevin Flynn, Bill Mauro, Steve Clark, Garfield Dunlop, Lisa MacLeod, Gilles Bisson, Cindy Forster;

The Standing Committee on Public Accounts: Dipika Damerla, Helena Jaczek, Phil McNeely, Shafiq Qaadri, Jerry Ouellette, Norm Miller, Toby Barrett, France Gélinas, Jagmeet Singh;

The Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills: Margaret Best, Joe Dickson, Vic Dhillon, Monte Kwinter, Randy Hillier, Rod Jackson, Bill Walker, Peter Tabuns, John Vanthof;

The Standing Committee on Social Policy: Lorenzo Berardinetti, Margaret Best, Helena Jaczek, Amrit Mangat, Ted Chudleigh, Ernie Hardeman, Jane McKenna, Cheri DiNovo, Michael Mantha; and

That, notwithstanding standing order 118, committee meetings be in accordance with the meeting schedule established for the 40th Parliament on February 27, 2012, with the first meeting of each committee being at the call of the Chair on a day specified in that schedule; however, that the first meeting occur within the first six sessional days of the passage of this motion for the purposes of organization and planning, regardless of whether or not the committee has any formal business to conduct.

That, notwithstanding the prorogation of the House, the following motions for the production of documents passed by a committee in the first session of the 40th Parliament that had remained outstanding at the date of prorogation shall be dealt with under the "Terms" outlined further below:

—May 9, 2012, committee Hansard page 199, motion by MPP Frank Klees, Standing Committee on Public Accounts;

—June 13, 2012, committee Hansard page 361, motion by MPP Frank Klees, Standing Committee on Public Accounts;

—June 13, 2012, committee Hansard page 361-362, motion by MPP Frank Klees, Standing Committee on Public Accounts;

—July 19, 2012, committee Hansard page 289, motion by MPP Michael Harris, Standing Committee on Estimates;

—August 1, 2012, committee Hansard page 643, motion by MPP Liz Sandals, Standing Committee on Public Accounts;

—August 1, 2012, committee Hansard page 643, motion by MPP Liz Sandals, Standing Committee on Public Accounts;

—August 2, 2012, committee Hansard page 672, motion by MPP France Gélinas, Standing Committee on Public Accounts;

—August 29, 2012, committee Hansard page 699, motion by MPP France Gélinas, Standing Committee on Public Accounts;

—August 29, 2012, committee Hansard page 700, motion by MPP France Gélinas, Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

Terms:

—The order shall be deemed to be made on the first day the committee meets in the second session;

—The time period for compliance with any such order shall be deemed to be seven sessional days from the first day the committee meets;

—The documents shall be tabled with the Clerk of the Committee; at least one copy of each shall be a paper copy for the permanent record; additional copies of each may be provided electronically, along with an explanation of the search terms, parameters and process; and

—That the committee may exercise its authority pursuant to standing order 110(b), where applicable, to order any further records or request any further search it considers relevant to the committee's terms of reference; and

That, notwithstanding any standing order, no government bill shall be referred to the Standing Committee on Estimates or to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Milloy moves that, notwithstanding

Interjection: Dispense.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Dispense? Agreed? Agreed.

All in favour of the motion? Agreed? Agreed.

Motion agreed to.

PETITIONS

WIND TURBINES

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present another petition from my riding of Durham and from my constituent [Inaudible] Rutherford, who is one of the people who gave me these petitions.

"Whereas industrial wind turbine developments have raised concerns among citizens over health, safety and property values; and

"Whereas the Green Energy Act allows wind turbine developments to bypass meaningful public input and municipal approvals;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Minister of the Environment revise the Green Energy Act to allow full public input and municipal approvals on all industrial wind farm developments and that a moratorium on wind development be declared until an independent, epidemiological study is completed into the health and environmental impacts of industrial wind turbines."

I beg the government and the new Minister of the Environment to heed the warning in this petition, and I sign it on behalf of my constituents.

1530

LANDFILL

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I have a petition signed by a great number of people in my municipality.

"Whereas many of the resources of this planet are finite and are necessary to sustain both life and quality of life for all future generations;

"Whereas the disposal of resources in landfills creates environmental hazards which will have significant human and financial costs for;

"Whereas all levels of government are elected to guarantee their constituents' physical, financial, emotional and mental well-being;

"Whereas the health risks of the community and watershed increase in direct relationship to the proximity of any landfill site;

"Whereas the placement of a landfill in a limestone quarry has been shown to be detrimental;

"Whereas the county of Oxford has passed a resolution requesting a moratorium on landfill construction or approval;

"Therefore be it resolved that we, the undersigned, humbly petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"To implement a moratorium in Oxford county on any future landfill construction approval until such time as a full review of alternatives has been completed which would examine best practices in other jurisdictions around the world;

"That this review of alternatives would give special emphasis on (a) practices which involve the total recycling and composting of all products currently destined for landfill sites in Ontario and (b) the production of goods which can efficiently and practically be recycled or reused so as not to require disposal in landfills."

Mr. Speaker, I thank you very much for the opportunity to present this petition, and I affix my signature to it.

LYME DISEASE

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the tick-borne illness known as chronic Lyme disease, which mimics many ... illnesses such as multiple sclerosis, Crohn's, Alzheimer's, arthritic diabetes, depression, chronic fatigue ... is increasingly endemic in Canada, but scientifically validated diagnostic tests and treatment choices are currently not available in Ontario, forcing patients to seek these in the USA and Europe; and

"Whereas the Canadian Medical Association informed the public, governments and the medical profession in the May 30, 2000, edition of their professional journal that Lyme disease is endemic throughout Canada, particularly in southern Ontario; and

"Whereas the Ontario public health system and the Ontario health insurance plan currently do not fund those specific tests that accurately serve the process of establishing a clinical diagnosis, but only recognize testing procedures known in the medical literature to provide false negatives at 45% to 95% of the time;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to request the Minister of Health to direct that the Ontario public health system and OHIP include all currently available and scientifically verified tests for acute and chronic Lyme diagnosis, to do everything necessary to create public awareness of Lyme disease in Ontario, and to have internationally developed diagnostic and successful treatment protocols available to patients and physicians."

I agree with this petition and I affix my name.

WIND TURBINES

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas residents of Ontario want a moratorium on all further industrial wind turbine development until a third party health and environmental study has been completed; and

"Whereas people in Ontario living within close proximity to industrial wind turbines have reported negative health effects; we need to study the physical, social, economic and environmental impacts of wind turbines; and

"Whereas Ontario's largest farm organization, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, and the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario have called for a suspension of industrial wind turbine development until the serious shortcomings can be addressed, and the Auditor General confirmed wind farms were created in haste and with no planning; and

"Whereas there have been no third party health and environmental studies done on industrial wind turbines, and the Auditor General confirmed there was no real 'plan' for green energy in Ontario and wind farms were constructed in haste;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the provincial government call for a moratorium on all industrial wind turbine development until a third party health and environmental study has been completed."

I, of course, support this petition and am pleased to affix my name to it and give it to page William.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further petitions? The member for Elgin–Middlesex–London.

WORKPLACE INSURANCE

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Thank you, Speaker. It's a pleasure to see you again.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the WSIB has mandated that effective January 1, 2013, all independent contractors and small business owners operating in the construction industry must have WSIB coverage;

"Whereas many of these business owners have their own private workplace insurance that in most cases is more affordable, more efficient and provides more extensive coverage;

"Whereas mandatory WSIB premiums add significant costs to small businesses and adversely affects their growth prospects and in some case their solvency;

"Whereas the government provided minimum notice about the change to businesses with WSIB sending out an official letter dated November 25, 2012;

"Whereas at a time when Ontario is facing a jobs crisis with 600,000 people unemployed, the government and its agencies should not be discouraging private sector job creation and growth by levying additional, unnecessary costs;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To direct the Minister of Labour to issue an order in council eliminating the requirement that mandates compulsory WSIB coverage on all independent contractors and small business owners in the construction industry."

I agree with this petition and I affix my signature to it.

AIR QUALITY

Mr. John O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to present another petition from my constituents in the riding of Durham, and really, it's talking about why the Drive Clean program should be scrapped. It reads as follows:

"Whereas collecting and restoring old vehicles honours Ontario's automotive heritage while contributing to the economy through the purchase of goods and services, tourism, and support for special events; and

"Whereas the stringent application of emissions regulations for older cars equipped with newer engines can result in fines and additional expenses that discourage car collectors and restorers from pursuing their hobby; and

"Whereas newer engines installed by hobbyists in vehicles over 20 years old provide cleaner emissions than the original equipment; and

"Whereas car collectors typically use their vehicles only on an occasional basis, during four to five months of the year;

"Therefore, be it resolved that the Ontario Legislature support Ontarians who collect and restore old vehicles by amending the appropriate laws and regulations to ensure vehicles over 20 years old and exempt from Drive Clean testing shall also be exempt from additional emissions requirements enforced by the Ministry of the Environment and governing the installation of newer engines into old cars and trucks."

I'm pleased to sign and support this and would encourage the Minister of the Environment to have a second look at the Drive Clean program completely.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Jim McDonell: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Auditor General confirmed in his December 2012 report that the Champlain CCAC had the longest wait time in Ontario in which 90% of their clients were placed; and

"Whereas the region requires a comprehensive plan assessing the future long-term-care bed needs of the region, as well as the provision of community care for independent and semi-independent seniors; and

"Whereas the number of Ontarians over 75 years of age is projected to increase by 30% by the year 2021, the year the baby boomers start to turn 75, putting even more demand on the number of available LTC beds;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care immediately conduct a study to identify the current and future requirements for long-term-care beds and community care for independent and semi-independent seniors in our region of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry, including the city of Cornwall;

"That such a study also identify future solutions for the current and future demand and the possible short- and long-term role the Cornwall General Hospital could play in fulfilling these requirements;

"That the Cornwall Community Hospital be funded to retain the Cornwall General Hospital until such a study is conducted and the role of this building is assessed as a solution of the LTC bed crisis."

I agree with this petition, I will be signing it and giving it off to page Angela.

HOSPITAL PARKING FEES

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Durham—very busy today.

Mr. John O'Toole: Yes, well, there's no one else reading petitions. I've always stood up for my constituents as effectively as possible.

"Whereas the United Senior Citizens of Ontario has expressed its concerns over the high costs of parking at hospitals in Ontario on behalf of its more than 300,000 members; and

"Whereas thousands of Ontario seniors find it difficult to live on their fixed income and cannot afford these extra hospital parking fees added to their daily living costs; and

"Whereas the Canadian Medical Association Journal has said in an editorial that parking fees are a barrier to health care and add additional stress to patients who have enough to deal with" with their illness;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That Ontario's members of provincial Parliament and" Dalton McGuinty, the former Premier—nothing has changed here, really—"take action to abolish parking fees for all seniors when visiting hospitals."

I'm pleased to present this petition on behalf of Muriel Lanigan, Barb Sheehan, Peggy Webb and many other people from my riding who are very concerned about these added costs of being in the hospitals in Ontario: the Dalton McGuinty tax.

1540

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Nipissing.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you, Speaker, and good afternoon.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the"—these are older petitions, Speaker, so it still says, "Whereas the McGuinty government has mismanaged negotiations with Ontario doctors; and

"Whereas" the government "has unilaterally imposed fee cuts that could negatively impact patients; and

"Whereas these changes will affect the ophthalmology, cardiology and radiology services that are currently crucial to many Ontarians' quality of life;

"We," the 12 pages of undersigned, "do hereby petition the government of Ontario as follows:

"[To] reach a negotiated settlement with the Ontario Medical Association that puts the needs of patients first and maintains a proper level of care for Ontarians."

I agree with this petition and I'll sign my name.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: "Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas" the Premier "has imposed fee schedule cuts to family physicians and proposed wage freezes unilaterally, she has therefore alienated the province's family doctors. These actions threaten the future of health care in Ontario and will compound the existing family

physician shortage. As wait times for primary care will inevitably increase, so will the frustration of millions of Ontarians;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"We ask that the Premier reconsider her decision and return to the negotiating table with the Ontario Medical Association and the province's doctors, thereby working alongside patients and their primary care providers."

I agree with this petition and affix my signature.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Jim McDonell: "Whereas families are concerned about the proposed changes to the Special Services at Home Program (SSAH) and the Passport Program under the Services and Supports to Promote the Social Inclusion of Persons with Developmental Disabilities Act (2008); and

"Whereas the system should allow for the seamless transfer of benefits to the Passport Program when the person turns 18 years of age, and not the current unacceptable cancellation of benefits and reapplication process that puts the person with an intellectual disability on a huge waiting list for months for the re-establishment of their benefits; and

"Whereas on September 20, 2012, the Legislature passed a motion by Progressive Conservative MPP Christine Elliott to immediately strike a select committee to develop a comprehensive developmental services strategy for Ontarians that addresses the needs of children, youth and adults in Ontario with an intellectual disability or who are dually diagnosed with an intellectual disability and a mental illness;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The government immediately strike a select committee to develop a comprehensive developmental services strategy for Ontarians that addresses the needs of children, youth and adults in Ontario with an intellectual disability or who are dually diagnosed with an intellectual disability and a mental illness and coordinates the delivery of developmental programs and services across many provincial ministries;

"To declare a moratorium on any changes until the select committee reports back to the Legislature and its recommendations are acted upon."

I do endorse this and will be signing it.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 98(c), a change has been made to the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business such that Mr. Shurman assumes ballot item number 1 and Mr. Hardeman assumes ballot item number 15.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

THRONE SPEECH DEBATE

DÉBAT SUR LE DISCOURS DU TRÔNE

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 20, 2013, on the motion for an address in reply to the speech of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor at the opening of the session.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Scarborough—Agincourt.

Ms. Soo Wong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

For young Ontarians, we know the throne speech will make a difference in terms of job creation. As indicated in the throne speech, our investment of \$50 million towards a new \$300-million venture capital partnership with the federal government and the private sector will create the environment necessary for the expansion of small businesses and to help start-ups get off the ground. This initiative will invite a new generation of successful business owners and innovation.

In my riding of Scarborough—Agincourt, residents can find comfort in this government's vision to support small businesses and entrepreneurial start-ups. Growing the economy and creating jobs, as outlined in the throne speech, are how this government will work to make a better future for the next generation.

To build a dynamic and a competitive economy, Ontario needs to stimulate productivity in all sectors. From manufacturing to financial services, automotive to agriculture and food processing, to film, music and digital media, this government is committed to forming new partnerships and charting a strong way forward, Mr. Speaker.

As a health care professional for almost 30 years, much of that time working in the community and in public health nursing, I know that we have a strong commitment to the promotion of health for the people of Ontario. We know that healthy people mean healthy communities. Our government has worked to tackle smoking and obesity and has advanced patient-centred care and evidence-based health policy. We are expanding support to people in their homes and addressing the needs of men and women across the province currently waiting for the home care services they require.

As outlined in the throne speech, Mr. Speaker, we will also continue to expand access to mental health services and support efforts to reduce stigma for men and women coping with mental illness. With healthy minds and healthy bodies, we can move forward and create a healthier tomorrow for our children.

In thinking about our children, we must also remember our respected seniors. We will move forward with a Seniors Strategy to best respond to the needs of an aging population. By promoting partnership between health care providers—from hospitals and long-term-care homes, to community support services and front-line medical providers through community health links—our

government will ensure that care for our loved ones and our most vulnerable citizens is constant and cohesive.

In order to ensure the best treatment for our children, our parents, our grandparents and our friends, the research community must be supported in its work. The throne speech also announced renewed support for the Ontario Brain Institute through a funding partnership with the private sector. Every dollar our government contributes will leverage four additional dollars from its partners by 2018.

To ensure the health and happiness of all Ontarians, our government continues to build the strongest and most innovative health care system in the world. We are committed to establishing international standards and saving innumerable lives.

Our government is committed to building healthy communities across Ontario, and this requires strong doses of compassion, forethought and collaboration, and having serious conversations about the needs of our communities.

In the throne speech, Mr. Speaker, the government signalled its intention of working collaboratively with our partners from all sectors. We also believe that communities must be involved and connected to one another. They must have a voice in their future and have a say in their integrated, regional development. Our government recognized local communities need to have a voice and to be involved if there is any creation or development of a gas plant, casino, wind plant or quarry in their hometown.

Our government believes that everyone must have the same firm footing. We look to strengthen the earning potential of all men and women in this province, whether they live in a city or in a small town, in the north or the south, and enable everyone to have a good job and secure paycheque. Our government is committed to following the recommendations of Frances Lankin and Munir Sheikh. This includes helping the unemployed to find a job. And our government is committed to ensure that those who are on social assistance get to keep more of what they have earned.

The government continues to strive to protect both the privacy and pocketbooks of all Ontarians. We're committed to helping the province's nine million drivers by continuing to implement the recommendations of the Auto Insurance Anti-Fraud Task Force, protecting individuals against fraud and working to reduce auto insurance rates across Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, as I conclude my remarks, I want to remind everybody in the House that our government believes that Ontario is a place of great possibilities. For the benefit of the entire province, our government is committed to working with the opposition parties and our community partners. Our government understands the importance of relationships—the relationship between us as citizens but also relationships between individuals and the whole. When Ontarians work together, regardless of their background, location or political leanings, this province can grow and prosper.

I want to conclude my remarks by challenging our colleagues opposite to work together for a better Ontario—because the throne speech challenged each one of us to be enthusiastic in supporting this throne speech, but more importantly, to build a better Ontario today and tomorrow, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you for this opportunity.

1550

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Ottawa—Orléans.

Mr. Phil McNeely: I want to thank MPP Soo Wong, the member for Scarborough—Agincourt, for starting us off this morning and this afternoon with her part. I'm pleased and honoured to be back in the House today as we convene the second session of the 40th Parliament.

I'd like to begin by congratulating our new leader, Premier Kathleen Wynne. Premier Wynne is a remarkable woman; Ontario's first female Premier, no less. I believe that she will be able to lead Ontario forward to prosperity with fiscal responsibility, efficiency and fairness. In fact, Premier Wynne has been hard at work for three weeks now, meeting with opposition parties, appointing our new cabinet, addressing the pressing stakeholder issues in education, and hosting a jobs round table in Toronto. This Friday, she will be doing the same in Ottawa, in my area. She has hit the ground running. Later this week I will be pleased to join her for the next jobs round table.

I also want to congratulate all members of cabinet on their appointments, and I sincerely look forward to working with all of you. I'm proud of the team that we have. It is a truly talented and diverse group.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a moment now to recognize and thank our Premier and leader for nine years, Dalton McGuinty. For the past nine years, the Liberal government, led by Mr. McGuinty, has accomplished so many things for Ontario. Our education system is the best in the world, our wait times the shortest. In addition to these milestones, I would like to thank Mr. McGuinty for the accomplishment that is closest to my heart: the closing of coal-burning power plants in Ontario.

In his recent inaugural address, United States President Barack Obama said the following: "We will respond to the threat of climate change, knowing that the failure to do so would betray our children and future generations. Some may still deny the overwhelming judgment of science, but none can avoid the devastating impact of raging fires, and crippling drought, and more powerful storms."

In the same vein, the head of the International Monetary Fund, Christine Lagarde, spoke in Davos and identified the threat of climate change as a more significant economic threat than global economic instability. I believe that the military of the United States has made similar comments. She said that climate change should not take second place to the economic problems that the European Union was suffering.

Members of this House know that pollution and climate change are long-time interests of mine and that I feel strongly that governments at all levels must take responsibility and address these issues before it is too late. I was lucky enough, late last fall, to attend the National Caucus of Environmental Legislators' Great Lakes forum in Chicago. The National Caucus of Environmental Legislators was organized to provide environmentally progressive legislators with opportunities to coordinate their activities and to share ideas on environmental issues. This includes Republicans and Democrats and, normally, people from Quebec and Ontario.

There, I was fortunate to run into my colleague Mr. Michael Harris, the member for Kitchener—Conestoga. In the spirit of co-operation and common ground we have seen in the throne speech, I look forward to meeting with Mr. Harris as well as the member for Davenport, Jonah Schein, who I believe is still the critic for the third party for the environment, to discuss climate change and the environmental issues we face. This year, as we get out of coal—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I hate to say anything, but there are like 14 little groups of discussions going on in the official opposition. Maybe we could cut it back to half at least and take the heavy ones outside, please. I'm having trouble hearing the member. Thank you.

Mr. Phil McNeely: Thank you, Speaker. In the context of Obama's speech, I'm especially proud of our Liberal government for getting Ontario out of coal. I'm pleased to recognize Dalton McGuinty for fulfilling the incredibly important promise we made to our province and our future generations.

Ontario was recently praised by the federal government in their response to the ambassador from the United States and the XL pipeline by saying that the United States could learn a lot about getting out of coal from Canada. He had to be looking at the record of Ontario to say that. Those were remarks by Minister Baird.

Yesterday was a great day for our government, and for Ontario, as we listened to the Lieutenant Governor deliver the speech from the throne. Yesterday's speech from the throne outlined priorities and a vision for Ontario. This vision is in line with the concerns of the opposition parties. Our new Premier made a concerted effort to fulfill her promise and met with the opposition leaders as soon as she took office. The direction outlined in the speech from the throne reflects those conversations and delivers common ground.

Members of the Legislature must work together to serve Ontario; it is what the public expects. Yesterday the Lieutenant Governor told us that our new government believes that Ontario is a place of endless possibilities, where we have different backgrounds and views, but share the same hopes. I think that this is an important message to all of us here in the Legislature as we move forward together, that we share the same hopes of

efficiency and fairness and of prosperity for our great province.

Our new government will focus on fiscal responsibility, economic growth and increased jobs. We know that a strong economic foundation is built on these principles and it's what Ontario needs to move forward.

Our new government will eliminate the deficit by 2017-18, while investing in our greatest strength, our people:

—enhancing the skills of our workforce, helping our youth find jobs, reforming social assistance; and increasing the number of people with disabilities in the workforce so we can confront our shared challenges together, building a strong, prosperous province;

—recognizing that innovation and technology is the key to winning the future, investing \$50 million in a new venture capital fund in partnership with the federal government to build the businesses of the future;

—working with aboriginal communities to make sure they get the tools and training they need to fully participate in economic development opportunities, including those related to our natural resources and education, training and employment;

—strengthening our earning potential, enabling everyone with a secure job and paycheque to create a workforce that will be Ontario's greatest strength, recognizing that with a youth unemployment rate at 15.7%, it is crucial to the long-term prosperity of Ontario that we address this issue.

I was pleased to see how serious our new government is about addressing this issue of youth employment. We'll partner with high schools, educators, colleges, universities, training partners and employers to establish opportunities for young people to enhance their skills, find placements, internships, co-op programs and valuable real-world experience.

Speaking of our youth, we must address the current education issue and what our new government has done and will do to address the concerns of our education partners. The speech from the throne outlined our plan for moving forward and treating Ontario's labour fairly and with respect.

The government will sit down with its partners across all sectors to build a sustainable model of wage negotiation and will be respectful of both collective bargaining and a fair and transparent interest arbitration process.

Hearing the reaction of the presidents of the OSSTF and the ETFO, Ontarians can feel confident that this new direction is the right one. Ken Coran, president of Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, said, "The new government has shown that the tide has turned and I know the Premier believes very much in collaboration and in setting forward discussions that are positive. What I heard from today's speech was a willingness to collaborate, a willingness to discuss; a willingness to be fair that is what we want to pursue."

Sam Hammond, president of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario said, "It was nice to hear

in the throne speech from this government there will be respect, transparency going forward with collective bargaining. I was glad to hear continued commitment to full-day kindergarten and education overall as a priority for this government. I can say that this government, under the new Premier and the new Minister of Education, has taken a giant step in the right direction in terms of respecting the process, respecting us as parties and partners."

For Ontario to prosper, our individual communities must prosper. There's not one member in this chamber today who can argue the importance of infrastructure in the role of community prosperity. Whether it is gridlock here in Toronto or access to the Ring of Fire, our government will hear the needs of all Ontarians who work to keep us moving.

I can tell this House how important this issue is, having dealt with serious gridlock issues in my riding of Ottawa-Orléans. I worked with the government for several years to increase accessibility and mobility for my constituents. We are fixing the split now, an important interchange for commuters accessing jobs in Ottawa. But the work has just begun, and congestion will only increase with our population growth.

I support the notion that infrastructure needs must be addressed and can no longer be mired in political rhetoric, and admire the recognition of the need for new revenue tools and dedicated revenue streams.

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All parties must agree on this if significant progress is to be made. Carol Wilding, president and CEO, Toronto Region Board of Trade, said, "Toronto Region Board of Trade is encouraged to hear the government is committed to addressing our region's infrastructure challenges. As the government said in the throne speech, we can no longer be mired in political rhetoric nor waste our time stuck in traffic. The question today is not if we need new revenue tools, but which ones. Toronto Region Board of Trade supports the government's view that co-operation is needed between all orders of government, and the public, and looks forward to participating in this discussion which is so vital to ensuring our economy remains globally competitive."

Geoff Wilkinson, executive director of the Ontario Road Builders' Association, said, "The Ontario Road Builders' Association is encouraged by Premier Wynne's understanding of the need to push forward on building modern transportation infrastructure as a means for promoting economic development in the province. We are ready and willing to work with the government, municipalities, and ... other stakeholders, to address the unique transportation needs of our province and to help realize Premier Wynne's vision for Ontario."

Our new government knows that if we invest in and help people now, the return on our investment will be immeasurable in the future. A fair society is an important part of the way forward for Ontario, and there are several ways that our new government will work toward this goal: We will help the unemployed find jobs; we'll

ensure safe, affordable housing; protect users against auto insurance fraud; strengthen consumer rights; combat smoking and obesity.

I'd just like to say how far we've come on the smoking part. I worked on the Smoke-Free Ottawa bylaw. I worked on the Smoke-Free Ontario legislation. In 2005, we made a decision to get the advertising out of retail. I worked on that project, and I'm glad to say that nobody today would ever tell me we should have advertising to get our kids to smoke, so I'm just mentioning that one. We'll continue on the anti-smoking work.

Dr. Doug Weir, president of the Ontario Medical Association, has said, "We are encouraged to see that today's throne speech renewed the government's commitment to health care initiatives long advocated by Ontario's doctors"—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Okay, this is the second call. The members in the official opposition are making a lot of noise, particularly over there. Last warning.

Go ahead.

Mr. Phil McNeely: Thank you, Speaker. I'll start over what Dr. Doug Weir said: "We are encouraged to see that today's throne speech renewed the government's commitment to health care initiatives long advocated by Ontario's doctors. Ontario's doctors are pleased that the government has pledged to increase access to mental health services and support efforts to reduce the stigma of mental illness. The government's commitment to focus on health promotion initiatives such as combating smoking and obesity is also a step in the right direction."

So we will continue expanding home care—something that is really working in our communities—and access to mental health services, while making sure Ontario is the best place to grow old in with our seniors' strategy, healthy home renovation tax credit and partnerships with health care providers, so our loved ones get the care they deserve.

We are moving forward with giving our youngest students the best start by continuing to roll out full-day kindergarten while maintaining lower class sizes, higher test scores and higher graduation rates. This we thank our teachers for.

We're also ensuring post-secondary education is affordable with the 30% off tuition grant, providing undergraduate university students with \$1,680 and undergraduate college students with \$770 each and every year.

I know that these priorities reflect not only the government's hopes but those of the opposition. With these goals, we have found common ground.

Ensuring that Ontario's francophone communities are recognized for their culture and contributions in so many important ways across our province: In my own constituency of Ottawa–Orléans, Carol Jolin, de l'Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens, a dit : « Ce qui me frappe dans le discours du trône, c'est que le gouvernement va se pencher sur l'accès aux programmes postsecondaires dans le centre-sud-ouest de

l'Ontario. Il y a un besoin indiscutable dans cette région et je suis content que le gouvernement ait pris conscience de cet enjeu. C'est un bon signe. »

François Boileau, du Commissariat aux services en français, a dit : « Je suis très enthousiaste que le gouvernement s'engage de façon claire et sans équivoque à offrir aux francophones, aux francophiles et aux nouveaux arrivants de l'Ontario un accès aux études postsecondaires en langue française qui répondre à leurs besoins, notamment dans le centre-sud-est de la province. »

Une communauté qui m'est chère et qui est très présente dans ma circonscription électorale est la communauté francophone. Vous me permettrez cette parenthèse aujourd'hui dû à un triste événement qui a frappé la communauté francophone ontarienne en fin de semaine, que j'aborderai un peu plus loin.

Je tenais à mentionner l'importance de l'apport des Franco-Ontariens à notre province. Le gouvernement de l'Ontario a toujours travaillé à maintenir, à développer, à prioriser et à s'assurer que notre province soit une société juste qui respecte ses minorités linguistiques. Nous constituons la plus grande communauté francophone hors du Québec, avec plus de 600 000 francophones. La région plus à l'est d'Ottawa compte près de 200 000 francophones lorsqu'on englobe les comtés de Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, Ottawa–Orléans et Ottawa–Vanier.

Je représente la merveilleuse communauté d'Ottawa–Orléans depuis 10 ans maintenant, avec ses 35 % de francophones. Je suis fier de ce que notre gouvernement a accompli pour l'ensemble des Ontariennes et Ontariens. On nous envie de partout pour notre système d'éducation et pour nos services en santé. Et, c'est vrai, les étudiants dans le système francophone s'arrangent très bien chaque année avec les tests qui sont pris dans les écoles. On nous envie de partout pour notre système d'éducation.

Les efforts ont été accomplis et les gestes nécessaires posés pour faire de la province de l'Ontario une des meilleures provinces au Canada. Mais je suis surtout très fier du respect que notre gouvernement a démontré envers la communauté francophone en accord avec nos responsabilités de niveau provincial.

Le gouvernement provincial a indéniablement une responsabilité envers les francophones—les Franco-Ontariennes et Franco-Ontariens. Nous avons posé plusieurs gestes au cours des dernières années pour assurer la viabilité de la communauté francophone. Ma collègue, la ministre responsable de la francophonie, est intervenue à maintes reprises auprès de cette Chambre et du gouvernement pour garantir l'épanouissement des francophones. Nous avons la chance d'avoir une communauté francophone dynamique, organisée et qui a su se donner des outils pour assurer leur visibilité en situation minoritaire.

Je ne ferai pas l'énumération de tous les organismes et associations francophones qui interviennent en leur nom à travers notre province, il y en aurait trop. Mais je ne peux passer sous silence l'héritage d'une grande dame de

la francophonie qui nous a malheureusement quitté de façon précipitée samedi dernier, le 16 février. Il s'agit de M^{me} Claudette Boyer. M^{me} Boyer était la preuve parfaite de la persistance et de l'importance de défendre les droits linguistiques en situation minoritaire. Elle a marqué l'Ontario et notre Parlement en devenant la première femme francophone élue à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario en 1999.

Notre province, la communauté francophile et principalement la communauté franco-ontarienne perdent une alliée de taille. Femme d'action hors pair, M^{me} Boyer a toujours su rassembler la communauté francophone et ce, peu importe leur origine. Elle préchait l'inclusion et a toujours reconnu l'apport des francophiles à la défense de la francophonie, et je la remercie grandement.

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M^{me} Boyer laissera certes un vide à Ottawa, tout comme dans le cœur des Ontariennes et Ontariens. A nous tous de lui prouver que ce qu'elle a apporté à la francophonie de l'Ontario est là pour rester et pour avancer vers le futur. Elle était de celle à crier haut et fort, à qui voulait bien l'entendre, qu'il fallait continuer à lutter pour renforcer les minorités.

La loi canadienne sur les langues officielles est claire : il faut assurer la vitalité de nos communautés de langue officielle en situation minoritaire. Le gouvernement fédéral en a la grande responsabilité, tout comme notre gouvernement et les gouvernements municipaux. Il ne faut pas poser des gestes ou prendre des décisions à l'encontre de cela.

Il faut continuer d'encourager la vitalité francophone et prendre les décisions qui s'imposent, mais surtout prendre les actions nécessaires pour assurer le maintien de cette vitalité linguistique. Nous devons tous être vigilants, et je sais que notre gouvernement assurera cette vigilance et verra à agir en conséquence pour protéger la communauté francophone et éviter son exode vers des localités plus anglophones. Je ne vous apprendrai rien en vous disant que les décisions prises par un palier gouvernemental ou autre ont un impact direct sur la communauté concernée.

Nous avons une législation fédérale, des droits constitutionnels, et aussi provinciale qui, si respectées, protègent les communautés linguistiques vivant en situation minoritaire.

Le plus grand allié de la francophonie ontarienne est l'union de ses forces pour la protection de ses droits linguistiques.

The approach of our new government to our economy will be creative and co-operative under the leadership of the new Premier, who is principled, positive, direct and collaborative.

Every step of the way, our new government is committing to working with the opposition to achieve these new goals because we do share the same concerns and, more importantly, the same hopes and dreams for our province.

I support this speech from the throne. I encourage all members of this Legislature to support it as well and to

recognize the common ground that we can find together as we move forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate? Leader of the official opposition.

Applause.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you, colleagues. Wait till after the speech and see if you still like it. Let's see how it goes.

First, Speaker, it's great to see you back in the chair after some absence. The position becomes you. I would also ask that you pass on my thanks to His Honour for reading yesterday's speech from the throne.

Speaker, I want to let you know, too, that I do intend to share my time by splitting it with my finance critic, the honourable member from Thornhill.

First, I'd like to extend my congratulations formally to Premier Wynne, as I did in question period today and as I respond to the speech from the throne, for being sworn in as Ontario's 25th Premier. It is indeed an incredible honour. I wish her well. It was great to see Jane here and the grandkids and the family during the swearing-in ceremony a week or so ago. And to all the newly sworn-in ministers, all the best, too. Congratulations.

I fondly remember, Speaker, back in 1999, being sworn in under Premier Mike Harris as Minister of Northern Development and Mines. At the time, I think I sat sort of in the back corner back there, and it was tremendously humbling. It was a great honour, and I saw many of the same emotions on the faces of the new cabinet ministers last week. I wish them every success.

Ontarians know that we can do better; we can do a lot better, and we must be bold in our pursuit of a better Ontario. We are now facing the biggest jobs and debt crisis of our lifetime. Anyone who's ever been faced with a crisis or an emergency knows that being cautious, being incremental, taking small steps, that's not going to save you. You have to do the opposite. The only way forward is to move swiftly and decisively in the direction you know in your gut is right, and right for this province. It is going to take a comprehensive and integrated plan to put Ontario back on the right path, but I am proud to say that the Ontario PC caucus and I have put forward such a plan—a positive vision that means Ontario will be a leader in Canada again, the kind of province that sees a government that spends within its means, that offers more value for less money, that focuses on the core priorities and gets the big things right.

A government that respects the people who elected it, the people who pay the bills—that is the vision I have for a government that leads a province like Ontario, that the world marvels at again.

An Ontario where everybody can wake up in the morning and know they've got a good job to go to and a steady income, and if they don't, they've got a good chance at getting that job really soon, where we proudly design, build, invent, grow, harvest, forge and mine things that are in demand from a global exporting powerhouse—that's the kind of Ontario I see.

An Ontario with the best health care system that does justice to the skilled professionals within it and, most importantly, puts the patient at the centre, so that you no longer have to fight like hell to get something done for a loved one, that respects the patient and professionals in our system—more front-line decisions and less from health bureaucrats, like we see at the LHINs.

An education system that properly prepares our children to succeed in an increasingly competitive world, that will raise the bar in math, in science and in literacy, and does a lot more in the skilled trades—that's the Ontario that we all want to build.

For more than a year now, my colleagues and I have spent every day proposing bold ideas on just how to do that. We put forward a series of detailed white papers. We call them Paths to Prosperity, that courageous vision to strengthen Ontario. You can see the whole list at ontariopc.com. Speaker, I know you've probably had a chance to check them out—and those listening in—but the Paths to Prosperity cover every dimension of the urgent action we need to turn our economy around and refocus government on the things that matter most.

The Premier had a lot of resources at her disposal. She had a chance to similarly put forward a comprehensive and integrated plan to reduce government spending and to grow the economy. I mentioned the 11 PC white papers that were at her disposal. Certainly, members of the third party brought forward their own ideas. We think, importantly, the 2012 report from the Commission on the Reform of Ontario's Public Services, also known as the Drummond commission—you may remember them, 362 ideas to get us out of this hole—and also several pieces of legislation from the PC caucus, including an across-the-board public sector wage freeze and needed arbitration reform. They had a lot of resources at their disposal.

Quite frankly, Speaker, we've waited 16 months since the last election. We had a four-month prorogation of the Legislature. It has been almost a month since Premier Wynne was named the leader of her party. The 600,000 women and men who woke up this morning with no job to go to, who have no job to go to tomorrow morning either, simply cannot afford to wait one more day. We need to restore hope to those who have lost hope, and tell them that there is a better day coming tomorrow, that Ontario can and will bounce back again.

Yesterday's speech from the throne was a moment of truth for Ontario. Ontarians were counting on all of us to come through for them, to put our province back on the right path, but regrettably, when they came to that fork in the road, Premier Wynne chose the easy path. She chose to entrench the McGuinty agenda, the same failed policies that brought us the worst jobs and debt crisis of our lifetime.

Let me describe the economic and fiscal realities that confront our province in 2013. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business tells us that public sector workers earn 27% more in wages, pensions and benefits than their counterparts in the private sector for the very

same job. It's not fair, it's not equitable and it's certainly not affordable.

Over the past decade, Ontario lost 300,000 good jobs in the manufacturing sector that helped to strengthen our middle class in communities like you represent in Hamilton-Stoney Creek, and I do, as well, in Niagara—300,000 good jobs gone in manufacturing, but at the same time they added 300,000 more jobs to an already-bloated government payroll.

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Last month alone, Speaker, we lost 48,000 jobs in the private sector in the province of Ontario. That's the greatest number of job losses since the recession. But while we lost 48,000 jobs in the private sector, we added an additional 9,000 jobs in the public sector. It exacerbates the problem. You cannot continue down that track. What that means is you have fewer people working outside the government paying for more and more working inside the government with higher wages, benefits and pensions than those who are paying the taxes in the first place.

Sadly, Speaker, we did not see any initiatives yesterday in the throne speech to reduce the size and cost of government. We see now the Liberal government backing away from any concept of a wage freeze whatsoever.

All this spending has meant that our debt has doubled in the last nine years and it's actually on track to tripling. We owe currently one third the size of our entire economy in debt. Everything our province produces, from Fort Erie to Ottawa to Kenora, Timmins—one third of that we owe every year in debt, Speaker.

Economists Jason Clemens and Niels Veldhuis compared Ontario recently to deteriorating jurisdictions like California and Greece. It's very sobering to see their proof that Ontario is actually in a worse position than California in every measure of indebtedness. It usually epitomizes the worst state, when it comes to debt and job losses, of the 50. Veldhuis and Clemens point out that Ontario is actually in a worse position when it comes to debt, and we're on our way to becoming the Greece of Canada. This is all fuelled, Speaker, like gas thrown on a fire, by government spending at triple the rate of inflation.

Yet not a single initiative to reduce spending came up in the speech from the throne. In fact, there were more promises, multiple new spending commitments, that we simply cannot afford if you can't find the savings to pay for them.

None of the taxpayers watching today, those that pay the bills, can afford to run their household that way. No single business can stay in business when they're running up the debt at that pace. We simply cannot continue to run this great province of Ontario that way. It's running us into the ground. We're spending more, and we're getting less, on the things that are most important to us.

Let me give you a few examples. In education alone, the government has increased spending by \$8.5 billion—per year, Speaker. That's not in the aggregate; per year: \$8.5 billion more for 250,000 fewer kids in our schools,

so a lot more money for fewer kids. And what are the results? A lot of kids can't count on playing on the hockey team after school, the school play, the drama club, extra help from teachers, because of their mis-handling of the education file. But also, as we saw recently, math scores and science scores have actually gone downhill. So we're spending more and getting less and failing to prepare our children for the challenges of the 21st-century economy.

In health care, similarly, we spend 40 cents of every dollar on health care—tremendous, dedicated talent in the system. We saw the government waste now \$2 billion in the eHealth scandal. We still have no system of electronic health records in our province. People are waiting up to two years for mental health services. Imagine that, Speaker. We have met with people who have said that their child is considering committing suicide, ending their life at a young age, and the parents hear back that they'll be on a wait-list for two years.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Heartbreaking.

Mr. Tim Hudak: It is heartbreaking. It's not the kind of Ontario we want to see, not the Ontario we grew up in and not the kind of Ontario we want to see for our kids and for our grandkids.

In energy, as much as \$1.3 billion, according to outside experts, and possibly more, was wasted on the politically motivated cancellation of two gas plants in Oakville and Mississauga to save Liberal seats in the last election. And, I might add, \$1.3 billion more, Speaker, for not a single new kilowatt of power to power our economy.

We continue to spend more and get less in return. As a result, for all this spending, now Ontario is first in debt and last in jobs.

We have a plan, Speaker, to turn that on its head. Ontario has done it before. We've dusted ourselves off. We've ushered in a new era of prosperity. We've been bold and courageous to say, "Here's the kind of Ontario we want to build." But it won't be easy. Every close call, every decision the government makes and every argument needs to be resolved on the basis of what will it do to grow our economy and to create jobs—to make deliberate choices, bold choices, but the right choices.

So far, we have not seen this Premier or this government make the right choices. The first act of this Premier was to increase the size of cabinet by 25%, a deliberate choice that's adding \$3 million more to our debt—but it also shows a lack of focus. Twenty-seven more ministers looking for more ways to spend money. That's not going to resolve our debt and jobs crisis.

A deliberate choice to hand the keys and the cheque-book over to the union bosses at the expense of our students and parents in our school system; a deliberate choice to continue the expensive Feed-In Tariff program and enforce wind farms that are dividing communities down the middle at the expense of local decision-making; a deliberate choice to park the Drummond commission's 362 recommendations permanently on the shelf; and a deliberate choice not to reverse a single one of Dalton McGuinty's damaging, job-killing policies.

Speaker, if we do not start to change the way we spend, to resist this temptation to overspend and pay for it with borrowed money, we may very well be soon at a point where we cannot even pay for the things that we hold dear, that we care about the most, and this is the irony of those who oppose our bold ideas. They talk about the need for compassion, but their approach has robbed us of the ability to be compassionate in the first place.

We need a new approach, and it starts with only as much government as we can afford. And anyone who stands in this place and tells you they can balance a \$12-billion deficit without reducing spending is either naive or they think that you are. We actually have to reduce spending. It needs to be done.

We cannot measure government success by the number of employees, the amount of money spent, the number of programs delivered. We must approach government the same way that Ontarians would approach their own businesses. If bureaucrats are not needed, if they're redundant, if they're not doing their jobs, well, they should no longer be on the government payroll. We must focus on the core services that matter most and create a leaner public service that delivers more value for less money.

Government is in too many businesses we have no business being in, so we should look to get out. We cannot keep a massive bureaucracy to dictate the size and shapes and shelving for alcohol bottles while rationing life-saving medicines that could bust cancer—keeping them off our formulary. The priorities are backwards, Speaker.

We shouldn't have government employees on the government payroll who serve drinks or deal blackjack—that's a private sector function—while over a million people in Ontario go without having a family doctor.

We must focus on growing the economy. Jobs should be job number one for the Premier, and job two and job three. If businesses and entrepreneurs do well in our province, then Ontario as a whole does well. That's why we need to lower taxes on businesses, so they can invest again and create good jobs in our province. More people working again means more revenue coming into the treasury, more businesses who invest in new equipment and new product lines. They innovate and they hire more people.

We must lift the heavy hand of government and reduce the 300,000 government regulations that stand between businesses and success. And we must treat energy as an economic fundamental, not double down on failed and expensive industrial wind farm experiments.

Businesses need to make tough decisions. They will choose to locate in jurisdictions where business costs are lower, approvals happen faster and the government treats them with respect, not suspicion. That's the kind of Ontario we want to build.

Looking back on yesterday's speech from the throne, there was no relief for businesses who are struggling today to keep afloat. It provided no help for those

400,000 people on welfare, the 600,000 who are unemployed—no hope for them for landing a good job to climb their way up to provide for their families. There was not an initiative to reduce spending so we can protect the things we actually care about.

There's no doubt, Speaker, the Premier took the easier road, but it wasn't the right approach. That's why we have become convinced that the only way to change the direction of this province, the only way to put Ontario back on track, the only way that our great province of Ontario can lead again, is to change the team that leads this province.

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The politically easy thing to do would be to let the throne speech pass. I know my colleagues in the third party are choosing to do exactly that. But I have a responsibility to demand a plan that brings about the change in direction that we desperately need. Supporting this throne speech would be the political equivalent of looking the other way when someone else is in trouble, pretending not to notice because it's the easier thing to do. Well, we in the Ontario PC Party are not going to look the other way any longer. We will lead the debate. We will prepare for the people of Ontario a much better course forward.

We have a vision of the province of Ontario that is confident, that is prosperous, that is a leader in Confederation again; a magnet for people from all across the world who want to come here for a safe harbour to get a better start, to build a business, to see it grow; an Ontario that will lead the world again in quality of life, the best-quality public services and private sector innovation, and foster entrepreneurship.

So I'm putting faith in the idea that Ontarians are ready for an honest message. It is not going to be easy. We face some difficult decisions to balance the books and become attractive for investment and job creation again. But if we make those calls, if we rise to the occasion, if we pull ourselves back on to our feet, there will be benefits for every Ontarian in every corner of this great province.

Our choice is clear. We will not run from the difficult decisions. We will protect the things that we care about. We will pursue bold ideas with an agenda to inspire that will return Ontario to prosperity again. We will do what needs to be done. And only with the will, the leadership and the courage of our convictions can we set Ontario on a new path.

Our province, Speaker, is at a crossroads: right direction or wrong direction, change or status quo, prosperity or further decline? It is time to choose our path. My choice—our choice—is clear. I will stand with Ontarians and choose a better path for Ontario. Our Ontario, Speaker, will lead again.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The Leader of the Opposition is finished? The member from Thornhill will continue.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Thank you, Speaker. I walked into this place yesterday, I'd like to say at the outset, with

a renewed sense of optimism. I gave what I thought was an open mind to hearing what the Lieutenant Governor would read on behalf of the new government of Premier Wynne, whom I congratulate on her new position.

The more I heard, the less enthusiastic I got. And the less enthusiastic I got, the more my mind began to wander. I found myself thinking about Miss Buckingham. None of you here know who Miss Buckingham is, so I'm going to tell you. She was my grade 9 history teacher. She had a great proclivity for administering exams that required essay questions to be answered full of facts. She was one of the great teachers of my life, in terms of making sure I had facts at the tip of my tongue, or at the very least, at the tip of my pencil—because I wrote an awful lot in those essay question responses that didn't contain facts. What would come back to me, like many of you, was a returned test with a big blue pencil across the top that said, "You talk a lot, but you don't say much."

The throne speech reminded me of Miss Buckingham, because if I had the throne speech, I'd write across it in great big blue pencil, "You talk a lot, but you don't say much."

The throne speech is called The Way Forward but more accurately should have been called The Tax and Spend Manifesto. Ultimately, the throne speech was very large on rhetoric, very short on details.

I talked about grade 9. I could go back even further to kindergarten and discuss fairy tales for a moment. Yesterday reminded me of Hansel and Gretel. It was almost as if they were here. The Liberals were sprinkling bread crumbs everywhere, a crumb here and a crumb there. They threw a bread crumb at the Progressive Conservative Party, our party, with a passing reference to home care, which we have said should be increased in the province of Ontario, and a little crust over at the NDP, to my left, with something about automobile insurance, but surely not what the NDP wants, not what any of us want. You nodded in our direction. That's what you did, Liberals. Congratulations on doing that.

But take a closer look, Speaker, and the crumbs begin to disappear, because, in fact, in that speech, there is no substance. Like Hansel and Gretel, Ontario is stuck in a dark forest and it's desperately trying to find a way out of the woods, but Ontario has no compass. We are not in a fairy tale. We are without a plan. And without a plan and a drastic change in direction, there will be no light at the end of the tunnel.

I'm saying this to the camera so that people at home can understand I'm talking to you. This is what we call the McGuinty-Wynne government, and we call it that because, in Ms. Wynne's own words, on the day that she became the leader of the Liberal Party, she said—and I'm paraphrasing—that she would continue the Dalton McGuinty legacy. That's what she would do. And indeed, if we can take the speech from the throne and what we've seen in just one question period this morning as any example, that's exactly what she intends to do.

The Liberal government does not have a plan to take us out of Ontario's financial disaster. There is no clarity. There is no substance. There is no clear direction. There is no plan. And as you've heard from the Leader of the Opposition, my colleague Tim Hudak, we do, and she does not.

Ontarians are left wondering when exactly the budget is going to be balanced, and when the economy is going to be restored and jobs are going to be created. Some 600,000 people are wanting right now, and I'll have more to say about that a little later on. Ontarians want and need to see their government with a clear path. We did not get this from the Liberals yesterday; we did not get it in question period this morning. That's why we cannot and we will not support this throne speech.

There is no path apparent to increase jobs in Ontario. There is no path apparent in terms of working towards paying down the debt. Interest is at \$11 billion this year. The Liberals—you people—celebrate the fact that you've got a \$12-billion deficit instead of a \$14-billion deficit. You think that's a good thing. You talk about balancing the budget and you talk about doing it by 2017. Ontarians deserve better.

Again, I want to address people at home. When I go out and I talk to ordinary people—smart people, educated people, working people and sometimes people who aren't working—and I talk about debt and I talk about deficit, they say, "Well, those are not really our concerns. Those are the concerns that we delegate to you, by electing you to go and represent the people of Thornhill, and 106 other people from various parties to represent their constituencies. Debt and deficit are not my problem."

Yes, debt and deficit are your problem, because when you have a deficit of \$12 billion, you compromise the ability of the province to direct itself financially on to the right course. You compromise the province's ability to create jobs in a necessary way. When you pay \$11 billion in a year towards interest, you take away the ability to buy, on a program spending basis, the things that you really need.

Ontarians indeed deserve better. We need to create jobs. We need to increase revenues. We need to restore hope to some 600,000 unemployed Ontarians. It is vital that we control our ballooning \$12-billion deficit and our burgeoning debt of around \$250 billion, that is the highest in Ontario's history—\$411 billion, by the estimate of the Liberal government's own economist, Don Drummond. You do that—you control that—and you're on track. We see no sign of anybody trying to control that.

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Again, to talk to ordinary people in an ordinary way: When we talk about debt and we talk about deficit, we talk about numbers with a huge number of zeros on them, and we talk about the effect on your kids and on your grandkids. The fact of the matter is, to bring it down to regular-people talk, we're talking about you having a credit card that has a limit of \$10,000, and you've managed to meet the payments. Then you talk the bank into letting you go to \$15,000, and you max that out. All

you can do is meet your interest payments and hope that some way, somehow, someday, you'll have money come in to retire that principal debt, but you know you won't. So, at some point, you won't be on this earth and somebody's going to have to pay that.

That's precisely what we're talking about, on a grand scale, when we talk about Ontario and the Ontario that we've got now. We owe \$16,900 in today's real money; every man, woman and child in Ontario owes that money. Can you imagine what would happen if we decided to retire the debt and everybody had a demand-to-pay? Of course, that is fantasy, but the fact of the matter is that's how it breaks down.

As outlined by Don Drummond in his report, the province's deficit could balloon to as much as \$30 billion by 2017, and our debt load, already worth 35% of annual economic output, could soar to 51%. The throne speech set a target of 27%. How? When? This is 2013 right now. How are they going to get into balance by 2017? Ontario's net debt is now forecast by the C.D. Howe Institute, no less, to peak at 41.6% of GDP by 2014-15. And 2014-15 leaves them two years to bring it down to the 27% target set in that throne speech by Premier Wynne.

The McGuinty-Wynne government's actual legacy is and will be debt and lost jobs and excessive spending without any plan. Throne speech interpreted: "We will keep the money tap turned on, and we will not control." That, Speaker, is what they intend to do, and that, Speaker, is what we intend to stop.

During the tenure of Dalton McGuinty, the Premier increased program spending by an average of 6.1% annually, nearly twice the combined rate of inflation and population growth of 3.1%. That statistic comes from the Fraser Institute, based on StatsCan figures. This is a very quick route to financial ruin. It is clear that Premier Wynne is continuing along the same path of reckless spending without a plan.

These are serious times, Speaker. We talk about a crisis. We talk about a debt crisis; we talk about a deficit crisis; we talk about a jobs crisis. We're not making this stuff up; we're not inventing it. When I talk to the people who are watching us on television, looking for some hope in a Legislature that's now in day 2, after almost a five-month hiatus, I say to you that there is hope, because there is a party here with a plan, but it's not the party in power, Speaker.

It is clear that this McGuinty-Wynne government is responsible for accumulating the largest debt in Ontario's history. This is a remarkable legacy. Ontario is saddled with a \$12-billion deficit this year; more, according to projections, next year. Ontario has become a have-not province. The throne speech did not address this in any meaningful way.

Businesses that used to be the pillars of our province, let alone our country, have now packed up and left or are considering doing just that.

This morning in question period, the member for Vaughan tried to ask a question. He was shot down by

the Speaker in midstream. He tried to ask a question that related to the right to work that was established recently in the state of Michigan, our neighbour, and called it into question by relating it somehow or other to a proposal that this party made.

I don't think the right to work has anything to do with what we're talking about, but the fact of the matter is, one thing that we do know is true is that there is a production line in the city of Oshawa that produces Camaros, and that production line is moving to the city of Detroit, in Michigan. There is a reason why that's happening, and the reason is that somebody at General Motors thinks—General Motors, I might add, the company that was bailed out in no small degree by money that came from the taxpayers of Ontario. Somebody thinks that Michigan can produce those cars just as well as Ontario, at a lower cost. We have to find a way to compete. The McGuinty-Wynne legacy is going to end up hurting future generations to an even greater extent than the generation that we live in now. There is, as somebody wiser than I has said, only one taxpayer. Ultimately, it will end up hitting our pocketbooks even harder than it is now.

The first move of Premier Wynne's was to instantly increase the size of her cabinet, which again costs taxpayers money.

Yesterday, there were many union leaders addressing the media outside the chamber. Ontario cannot afford to have unions continue to control the agenda as they have with the Liberal government in the past. It was rather interesting to me, walking around outside in the antechamber to this room, after the speech from the throne. The cameras were not on the finance minister; he was walking around looking for something to do. They weren't on the Premier; she was nowhere to be found. They weren't on, really, any opposition members. They were on four people, and the four people were names you know—the Fred Hahns and the Sid Ryans of the world. I guess they feel, if you take a look at the reports last night, that there's some hope because of the establishment of this government.

The McGuinty-Wynne government wants to get back what we estimate to be about \$9 million in free advertising that comes from a coalition of unions called the Working Families Coalition to help it get elected, and you can see that that massaging is starting already. Premier Wynne has to realize that the financial impact that pandering to union bosses has on our pocketbooks is incredible.

The Fraser Institute says that public sector wages at this point are about 13.9%, on average, higher than equivalent private sector wages, and that doesn't include the benefits that are inherent in the system. If you take a look at figures that have come from the CFIB, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, that number is about 27%. They're probably comparable if you take a look at the pensions. Pensions, by way of example, in the public sector—75% of people are covered by some kind of registered pension plan. In the

private sector, it's about a third of that—25% of the citizenry of Ontario have access to a pension. So there's a great disparity.

When we talk about that and we talk about—as you've heard my leader say—the concept of beginning to control spending by looking at the largest single budgetary item we've got, which is salaries, at \$55 billion of a total of about \$130 billion in budgetary spending, you've got to consider some kind of a freeze, and they say that they won't. So the concept that we express, that they're going to continue the ways of Dalton McGuinty, is not just conceptual; it's real. Billions of taxpayer dollars were thrown out the window by the McGuinty-Wynne government over things like eHealth and Ornge and the power plant fiasco. So many other things jump into my mind: Cancer Care Ontario, the Windsor Energy Centre, things that this party has raised, the other party has raised, and many, many more that I could name.

The cancellation of the power plants, or Project Vapour, was an elaborate scheme for the Liberals' political gain that has cost taxpayers some number. We're not sure what it was. Maybe \$1 billion; maybe more. The Premier won't even strike a special committee to investigate and labels the opposition parties, for even suggesting that idea, as mean-spirited.

This led to the prorogation of Parliament to attempt to cover up that mess. In fact, one of the prime beneficiaries of this political gain sits right across from me in the person of the new finance minister, Charles Sousa.

While the PC caucus has been working for Ontario, the Liberals have been busy working to find a new leader. We on this side of the House have a plan. We can address these crises. You on the other side cannot, and you have proven you will not.

We have heard a lot about this—and I'm quoting from yesterday at least nine times—"new government." New in name, yes; new in practice, no way. It's just a different day. Ontarians are not going to be fooled by the McGuinty-Wynne government trying to pass any of this nonsense off as new. There's nothing new about this. We have a carbon copy of Dalton McGuinty who just wears different shoes—the same players and the same story as the past almost 10 years. God help us.

We all know that you cannot increase government spending and be in debt without going into financial ruin. Something has got to give. Don't take my word for it, Speaker. Don't take my word for it, Ontarians. Look across the ocean, look at Europe, and you see the future of a McGuinty-Wynne Ontario. Don't let it happen.

For a robust economy and to attract jobs to Ontario, we must continue to invest in our infrastructure and a regional transportation system. The Toronto Region Board of Trade has calculated that the GTHA loses about \$6 billion every year due to labour that's lost via productivity because we're so stuck in gridlock.

And you know what? I was pleased, Speaker, that this was mentioned in the speech from the throne. Unfortunately, there was no fix involved, just the fact that it existed. But the fact of the matter is that this government

has a lot of experience in gridlock, because Ontario, under its tutelage, is itself stuck in gridlock.

The Premier alluded to different revenue tools to fund transportation but failed to give Ontario any details. What do we know about details, Speaker? The devil is in the details. All talk, little action; McGuinty-Wynne, Wynne-McGuinty—interchangeable.

Because of our increasing debt and the government's lack of a credible plan to eliminate it, global credit rating agencies downgraded Ontario's credit rating last year. In April 2012, Moody's downgraded Ontario's credit rating, and it said, "reflects the growing debt burden and the risks surrounding the province achieving its medium-term fiscal plan given the subdued growth outlook, extended time frame back to balance and ambitious expenditure targets." That's a quote.

And Moody's pointed out that there are "significant risks surrounding" their "ability to achieve their medium-term fiscal targets and stabilize and then reverse the recent accumulation in debt....expense growth targets appear particularly ambitious."

Even these credit rating agencies are begging the Liberal government to get Ontario back on track to create jobs and to bolster our economy.

We urgently need a plan to forge ahead with a clearly charted path. We Progressive Conservatives have a plan. We have a jobs plan; we have a cost reduction plan; we have a plan to balance the budget. You Liberals do not.

We need to send a serious signal to investors that Ontario is ready to tackle its economic challenges, to get

our finances in order. We need to attract more jobs here to Ontario. We need to attract business to Ontario.

The government desperately needs to get us on the path to job creation and fiscal responsibility. We need a government that is actually committed to helping Ontario's economy and to the creation of jobs.

Again and finally, quoting my grade 9 teacher, "You talk a lot, but you don't say much." The throne speech, to me, is very disappointing. The PCs will definitely not support it. The more things change, the more they remain the same.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I move adjournment of the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Ms. DiNovo has moved adjournment of debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Debate adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Orders of the day.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The government House leader has moved adjournment of the House. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

This House stands adjourned until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1654.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Tonia Grannum, Trevor Day, Anne Stokes

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Berardineti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough–Sud-Ouest	
Best, Margaret R. (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	
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Campbell, Sarah (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	
Cansfield, Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport Minister Responsible for the 2015 Pan and Parapan American Games / Ministre responsable des Jeux panaméricains et parapanaméricains de 2015
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Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Halton	
Clark, Steve (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Coteau, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Crack, Grant (LIB)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Craitor, Kim (LIB)	Niagara Falls	
Damerla, Dipika (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	
Del Duca, Steven (LIB)	Vaughan	
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
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Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Fedeli, Victor (PC)	Nipissing	
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Kitchener–Waterloo	

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Flynn, Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	
Forster, Cindy (NDP)	Welland	Deputy House Leader, Recognized Party / Leader parlementaire adjointe de parti reconnu
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Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les îles	Attorney General / Procureur général
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay-Superior North / Thunder Bay-Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
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Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hoskins, Hon. / L'hon. Eric (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment / Ministre du Développement économique, du Commerce et de l'Emploi
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West-Glanbrook / Niagara-Ouest-Glanbrook	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
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Jaczek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges-Markham	
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Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket-Aurora	
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Levac, Hon. / L'hon. Dave (LIB)	Brant	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
MacCharles, Hon. / L'hon. Tracy (LIB)	Pickering-Scarborough East / Pickering-Scarborough-Est	Minister of Consumer Services / Ministre des Services aux consommateurs
MacLaren, Jack (PC)	Carleton-Mississippi Mills	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean-Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga-Brampton South / Mississauga-Brampton-Sud	
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma-Manitoulin	
Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity-Spadina	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Mauro, Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay-Atikokan	
McDonell, Jim (PC)	Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry	
McGuinty, Dalton (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	
McKenna, Jane (PC)	Burlington	
McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Westdale	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires
McNaughton, Monte (PC)	Lambton-Kent-Middlesex	
McNeely, Phil (LIB)	Ottawa-Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa-Vanier	
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound-Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East-Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est-Stoney Creek	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre délégué aux Affaires francophones
Milligan, Rob E. (PC)	Northumberland-Quinte West	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement

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Naqvi, Hon. / L'hon. Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Natyshak, Taras (NDP)	Essex	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
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O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	
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Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth-Wellington	
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Prue, Michael (NDP)	Beaches-East York	
Qaadir, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Sandals, Hon. / L'hon. Liz (LIB)	Guelph	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Schein, Jonah (NDP)	Davenport	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock	
Sergio, Hon. / L'hon. Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	Minister Responsible for Seniors / Ministre délégué aux Affaires des personnes âgées
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Thornhill	Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Singh, Jagmeet (NDP)	Bramalea-Gore-Malton	
Smith, Todd (PC)	Prince Edward-Hastings	
Sousa, Hon. / L'hon. Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto-Danforth	
Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga-Erindale	Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / Président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement Minister of Government Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux
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Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming-Cochrane	
Walker, Bill (PC)	Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound	
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe-Grey	
Wong, Soo (LIB)	Scarborough-Agincourt	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Agriculture and Food / Ministre de l'Agriculture et de l'Alimentation Premier / Première ministre Leader, Government / Chef du gouvernement Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke	
Yurek, Jeff (PC)	Elgin-Middlesex-London	
Zimmer, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Willowdale	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Vacant	London West / London-Ouest	
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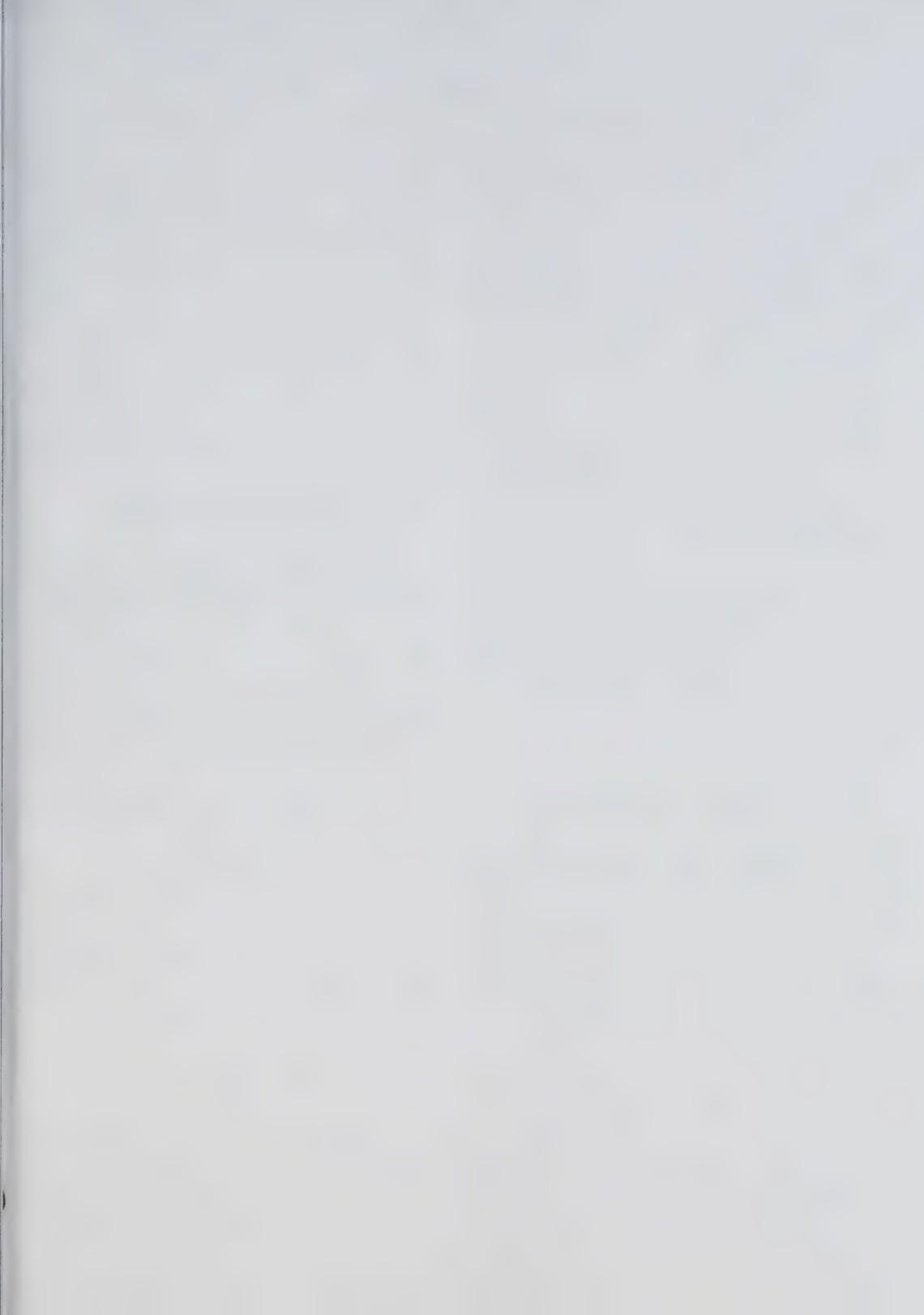
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No. 3

Nº 3

ISSN 1180-2987

Legislative Assembly of Ontario

Second Session, 40th Parliament

Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

Deuxième session, 40^e législature

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Thursday 21 February 2013

Jeudi 21 février 2013

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

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Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Service du Journal des débats et d'interprétation
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 21 February 2013

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 21 février 2013

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

THRONE SPEECH DEBATE

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 20, 2013, on the motion for an address in reply to the speech of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor at the opening of the session.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The leader of the third party.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's—

Applause.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Thank you.

It is my pleasure to respond to the speech from the throne that was read by the Lieutenant Governor a couple of days ago, on behalf of New Democrats here in the Legislature.

I think the first thing to note is that the speech from the throne was a far-ranging document. It was quite broad and quite vague, but New Democrats are going to take the Premier at her word when she talks about a number of things that we want to see achieved in this session, including the upcoming budget. I'm going to give you a little bit of detail about that, Speaker, because I think it's really clear here in Ontario that Ontarians have been waiting far too long for action on a number of the problems that they face.

We know that this place was suspended—right?—this place was prorogued. It was put on hold while the governing party, the Liberals, spent a number of months putting their own house in order, getting their own business figured out. In the meantime, everybody else in the province was put on the back burner. That's not good enough, Speaker. We didn't want that to happen. We didn't think it was necessary. But here we are finally, five months later, back to business here in the Legislature. And the throne speech, I think, is something that the New Democrats are taking with a grain of salt.

Speaker, I should let you know that I'll be sharing my time this morning with my government House—or my House leader, Gilles Bisson—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Government House leader is good.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: —government House leader, that's [*inaudible*]—as well as the member for Kitchener-Waterloo, Catherine Fife.

Anyway, back to my comments. The reality is, the people of this province have been waiting far too long for their problems to be solved. The Liberals enjoy solving their own problems. They enjoy spending time on their own issues. They enjoy taking care of their own political skin and their own political back, but when it comes to the problems Ontarians face, not much has been done. In fact, I would say nothing at all has been done, and we know that nothing has been done in the last several months—that's for sure.

So what am I talking about when I talk about the problems that Ontario people, Ontario families, Ontarians are facing? We have a youth unemployment rate in this province of 15.7%—almost 16%. That's far too high. We see article after article, more and more research coming out, that indicates very clearly that when young people have to delay or are forced to delay their connection with their careers, their connection with the workplace, it has many, many negative effects.

First and foremost, an obvious effect is that, of course, young people end up, by the time they're finished their working lives, having been very seriously disadvantaged in terms of their lifelong earnings if they're not able to engage in meaningful work and their career-oriented work at an early enough time in their lives. But that's only the financial issue, Speaker. We know that young people suffer from great issues and problems around self-esteem, around worrying about the future, stress, mental health issues. All of these things come to bear when young people are unable to find their first attachment to the workforce or their first experience in meaningful work.

So we think this is a problem that has lasted far too long. New Democrats have, for several years now, been bringing to the table, here in the Legislature, a number of ways to increase employment, to deal with the jobs crisis in this province overall. The government stubbornly—the Liberals stubbornly—refused to take any of our suggestions and implement them. That's not good enough, Speaker, because people have suffered in the meantime.

There has been no jobs plan from the government. In fact, the only jobs plan they had was an HST that was supposed to bring 600,000 jobs and instead brought none and instead made life more difficult for the people of this province. It made them have a more difficult time in terms of making ends meet, Speaker.

I want to say that our ideas on job creation overall have been ignored. We've gone nowhere in this province in terms of job creation. So we still want them to implement the job creation ideas that we've brought forward.

But now we are adding another piece to that, another layer to that, and that is making sure that we actually specifically attack youth unemployment. We've got a real serious problem there, and we've got a real, I think, smart idea in terms of how we can engage corporations, engage businesses, in working with us to put young people to work. We call it the First Start program. It's a sensible program. It's a wage subsidy program that encourages businesses to provide meaningful work for young people. So there would have to be a training component. There are many more details, which are easily described, and I'm sure the government is quite aware of what those are.

But as I was saying, one of the other problems that people are facing—with the HST and with all of the new kinds of burdens that the Liberals have put on the families of this province while not paying attention to the fact that they were losing their paycheques or having their paycheques reduced—is the fact that life has become extremely unaffordable. In fact, everywhere I go, people are very, very worried about the future. They feel like they're losing ground. They know that they are losing ground.

I'm not sure if you know this, Speaker, but in 2011, there was in Ontario—one of the only provinces in the country where this happened—actually a reduction in the average wages in our province. People actually really did lose ground. Wages went down in Ontario. That's a shameful thing to have happen.

So it's not just people's imagination that life is becoming tougher. We see in the papers all the time the fear, the worry around people's household debt increasing. Why is the household debt of average families in this province increasing? It's because they cannot make ends meet, and they're trying to hold on to a decent quality of life. So they turn to their lines of credit or their credit cards or other credit instruments to try to maintain a decent quality of life. That's a shameful record for the Liberal government. They've continued to make life more difficult for folks and they've continued to make the future more insecure for the people of this province.

What we want to do, what New Democrats want to do—on top of putting young people back to work and partnering with companies to do that—we want to make life more affordable for people.

We talked about that last year as well. We wanted to see the HST come off of home heating bills. Again, the Liberals refused to make life more affordable for people. So this time we're saying, "Okay. You refuse to make life more affordable for people, but we have a good idea." We have an idea that says to the government, "You've changed policy in terms of the auto insurance industry. You've made sure that the auto insurance industry has benefitted very much financially from the policy changes that the Liberal government has put in

place"—to the tune of \$2 billion in extra profits because of the way that the system was adjusted by the Liberal government.

None of that \$2-billion windfall that the Liberals handed the insurance industry was passed on to the consumers. Not a single dime was passed on to the consumers in savings. You know what? In the province of Ontario—everybody knows it—we don't have a choice. If you are going to drive a car, you must have auto insurance. So then why is it that public policy, Liberal-style, is all about making sure insurance companies do better instead of making sure that something that we require people to purchase is in fact affordable? It makes no sense. It sounds like it's more insurance industry policy as opposed to public policy.

0910

The Liberals have been on the wrong track for a long time and I'm hoping that I see in this budget upcoming a big difference in terms of their direction. Nice words, nice promises in a throne speech, but the rubber hits the road in a budget, and in that budget I want to see affordability measures, particularly on auto insurance, and I want to see a real jobs plan to get young people back to work.

The other thing we know that continues to be a problem in this province is the health care system. Again, we hear all the platitudes, and we see the government proudly speaking about the achievements that they think they've been able to bring to Ontario in terms of health care reform, but I've got to tell you, wherever I go in Ontario, that's not the way people see it. You know, we go to some communities in northern Ontario, and people are waiting 262 days for home care services. Now, how on earth can somebody wait for 262 days for home care service? How on earth can we not expect that to create a crisis for that individual and end them back up in hospital? It happens and that's why we have a revolving door when it comes to our hospital sector, and the pressure that we have on emergency wards is because, frankly, the home care system is a mess. The Liberals have actually allowed it to continue to be a mess.

What we want to do is we want to make sure that every single person in this province who is assessed and is qualified for home care is able to get that home care within five days—a five-day guarantee for home care, again, another thing that this government needs to put in the upcoming budget, because obviously it's something that they have allowed to fall apart, frankly, here in Ontario. It's an extremely, extremely important service that people should be able to rely on, not only at some point in time but in a very appropriate time frame—within five days of being assessed as needing it.

There's another big piece to what we see as a problem here in Ontario. There has been a complete lack of balance with Liberal budgets. We've seen this year after year after year, where Liberal budgets and Liberal policies tend to favour certain sectors that they like and that they enjoy a cozy relationship with, while everyday

families are left to languish and not have their needs met and not have their concerns and issues addressed.

One of the things that we think is a smart thing to do is actually to deal with some of the corporate tax loopholes that currently exist in this province. What we believe is that we can achieve some of these improvements for everyday families if we close up some of those corporate tax loopholes and make sure that everybody, every person and every business, is actually contributing to the well-being of our province. There is no reason to allow billions of dollars to escape, if you will, into the ether without thinking seriously about how we capture those dollars and put them to work for Ontarians.

So there are a number of things that can be done in that regard. We've talked about, obviously, making sure that when companies are making profits here in Ontario, that those profits are actually taxed here in Ontario, so that companies are not allowed to move their profits and losses around the country to be able to find the best tax rate, to be able to declare them in the province where they can get the best deal.

Similarly, we don't think that they should be able to move their profits to sister companies offshore in other countries. Again, if you are earning your profits here in Ontario, you should be paying the appropriate taxes to our system. Now this isn't rocket science, Speaker, and it's not unfair. In fact, the government's own guru, who was trying to get them to think about some of the ways to make this province a little bit more fiscally stable last year, Mr. Don Drummond, gave them that very advice. There's not a lot of stuff—you wouldn't be surprised to know there's not a lot of stuff that I agreed with in Mr. Drummond's report, but there were a few little nuggets and that was one of them; to make sure that companies actually pay their taxes here in Ontario. I don't think it's much to ask, and I think regular Ontarians would think it's only fair that that happens.

Then we have another couple of things. We have a government that in 2015 is ready—is just waiting—to be able to open up a new tax loophole for corporations.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: We can't afford that.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: We simply can't afford it. Mr. Bisson, the member for Timmins–James Bay, is in fact correct. At this time, we cannot afford the largesse of having companies in 2015 able to write off their HST on entertaining their clients—on going to dinners and having drinks and going to entertainment venues. This kind of thing is not happening right now; this is a new loophole that is intended to be implemented in 2015, and I would ask the Liberals and the Premier to think very carefully if that's where we want to invest our dollars.

Do we want to invest our dollars in an HST rebate for companies while they wine and dine their clients, or would we rather ask those companies to work with us to put young people back to work and give them that kind of reward? Give them a reward when they put young people back to work or put young people to work for the first time, instead of giving them a reward when they wine and dine their clients. To me, Speaker, it's a simple,

balanced and smart approach. It's about your priorities. New Democrats know what our priorities are. I hope that the Liberals have changed their priorities and are starting to think about how to make life better for everyday Ontarians, because that really is our job here, believe it or not.

There's another issue around the employer health tax, which we think is a good program for small business. It helps strengthen small business. It helps relieve them of a little bit of pressure as they struggle, because we know small businesses have a difficult time, especially in their first couple of years. It's a difficult thing for small business to stay up and running, and one of the ways that government can help them is by relieving them of the pressure of the employer health tax. You know what? We support that for small business.

But one of the things that's happened is, of course, that the first \$400,000 of payroll exemption from the employer health tax has been extended to big, large, huge, profitable corporations—banks, insurance companies, you name it. Well, you know what, Speaker? Is that really necessary? We don't think so. We think that a small business program that's aimed at helping small business should be in place, but it's not necessary for big business. Big business should be paying the employer health tax from the first dollar of wages that they're paying for their employees. So we think that's another loophole that the government needs to close.

The bottom line is that New Democrats want to see a real change in direction from the Liberals. Liberals talk a good talk, but when it comes down to walking the walk we have not seen the results that the people of this province deserve, and time's a-ticking. The election was almost—what is it now?—a year and a half ago, and literally nothing has been done, or very little has been done, for the people of this province. A lot has been done for the Liberal Party. They've had a lot of time to do their own stuff and do their own thing and feel good about it. Well, I've got to tell you: The people of the province aren't feeling all that good. They're feeling, rightfully so, that they've been ignored and that they've been allowed to languish in the wilderness while the Liberals take care of themselves and their friends.

As I said, I'm encouraged by some of the language in the throne speech, Speaker, but I think that vague promises are simply not enough. We want to get results. We want to see results. And we want to make sure that the budget is a document, unlike the throne speech, that actually gets results for the people of Ontario.

You know, I have to say that I think the people of the province have gotten to know me well enough to know one of the things I prefer to do is actually listen to what they have to say and pay attention to what their concerns and problems are. I've said it often, and it's a funny thing, that we politicians need to do that a little more—you know, keep our mouths shut and our ears open. It's something that I actually have been doing for some time now, even before my political career, because I believe people actually have great insights into what faces them,

particularly in terms of their problems, but also great ideas in terms of solutions that are potential resolutions to some of the problems they face.

It seems to me that this is a piece of advice I could probably give the Premier right about now. The Premier likes to talk about talking. She likes to talk about conversation; it's all about the conversation. I've got to tell you: For the people of the province, the time for conversation is waning. It is time for action. It is absolutely time for action. It's time to actually put in place some real changes that are going to positively affect the people of this province.

0920

We believe that the program or the ideas or the proposals we've put forward are very practical proposals. They're extremely affordable proposals, and they are achievable proposals in the very short term. These things can be achieved in the short term with the will and the action of this government, and I'm certainly hopeful, Speaker, that we're going to see that action. We can actually achieve these results without cutting anywhere else. We can achieve these results simply by putting in place all of the things that New Democrats have brought forward.

I look forward to the next couple of weeks. I look forward to an open and transparent budget process. I look forward to a budget document that reflects our ideas, that puts into action these changes that Ontarians have been waiting far too long to see—changes that will strengthen health care, changes that will make life more affordable for the people of this province, changes that will bring fairness to our fiscal situation here in Ontario and changes that will take a real effort, putting young people back to work.

It's not a huge list, Speaker. It's a practical, achievable road map to actually get some results for the people of Ontario, and that's what we're here to do. That's what New Democrats committed to do the day the people of this province chose a minority government. We have been rolling up our sleeves. We have been working very hard. We have been bringing practical, smart ideas to the table.

The government now needs to take action. The ball is in the government's court. The Liberals need to decide: Is it action time or is it just more time for talk? Is it time to put the people of this province on the front burner or is it time to leave them in the dust the way you've done for the last several years? That's the choice that's in front of this Premier. It's a clear choice; I hope she makes the right one. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Timmins–James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Mr. Speaker, how do I follow up on that? That was pretty clear. I thought that was pretty concise, and it was a pretty practical message that speaks to the need to be able to do things for Ontarians in their day-to-day lives.

Sometimes people forget around this place—sincerely, I think this government has lost its way over the last nine

years—to remember what we're here for. We're here for the people back home, the people we represent in our constituencies, and not only in our own constituencies but the people who live in Ontario. It's about making laws and doing policies that affect people back home in a positive way. This government, for whatever reason, over the last nine years that they've been in power, has lost sight of that.

They were elected with great fanfare, great excitement, great expectation, but it seemed on their way to the cabinet room they forgot why they were sent here, and that was to ensure that the people back home know that when a government is making a decision here at Queen's Park, it's making that decision in a balanced way that recognizes the fiscal realities of this province but also recognizes that people back home have to balance their budget books too.

When people back home are hurting on the financial side because, as our leader, Andrea Horwath, said, the real income in this province has dropped over the last number of years, the people back home say, "You know what? All I know is that I work harder, I work longer and I'm falling further and further behind." Some, unfortunately, don't even feel that they're secure in the job that they've got, and some are looking for their first job. So they want to see these politicians at Queen's Park, in this place, do what is important for them back home, because it is really all about that.

We have laid out—Andrea Horwath, as our leader—a number of things that we want to see done in this budget cycle. Now, I listened, as everybody else in this Legislature did, to the throne speech the other day. I've got to say there was something in there for everyone. It was a typical sort of Liberal throne speech where they try to touch all the points so that people back home could say, "Oh, they've talked about something for me." I think that's a good start, but there wasn't a heck of a lot of detail about what it is they were going to do in order to achieve anything that was spoken to in the throne speech.

As Andrea Horwath, our leader, says, we're hopeful that what the Premier is saying when she says, "I want to reach across to the opposition parties, both the Conservatives and New Democrats, to look at how we can do some of these things"—we're going to take them at face value, that they're actually going to try to do that. But we're putting you on warning: You have to do that. If you just engage in a discussion, if you just engage in dialogue, if you just engage in the discussion, as the Premier seems to be saying she wants to talk to everyone—what we need to see is the walk, not just the talk. We need to know that, in the end, there are going to be some real results for people back home.

I'm going to speak to a couple of the issues that we have within the ideas that we've put forward, and I want to start with home care because it is something that I think we're all dealing with in our own constituencies back home.

I'm going to give you a couple of examples. Velma, who lives in the city of Timmins: She's been in the

papers, so I can talk about her story and I got permission to talk about it. She lives in an apartment building in Timmins and she has severe arthritis. All she needs to have to be able to live at home independently and not have to cost the taxpayers a lot of money and an ALC bed at the hospital or in a long-term-care facility, is to make sure somebody comes in and bathes her a couple of times a week and does her laundry.

Poor Velma got sick a while back—she had those services. She landed in the hospital, and because she was out of the long-term-care system for a while, the community care system, when she went back home they did a reassessment and said, “Velma, we’re going to send somebody to do your bath.” She said, “Well, that’s nice, but who’s going to do my laundry? Can’t you notice I can’t use my hands?”

It’s amazing what this woman does. I went to visit her in her apartment with our intern who was with us last fall, and this woman keeps an immaculate, spotless, clean apartment. I don’t know how she does it because she is really facing a lot of physical challenges because of her arthritis and other health conditions that she’s got. But the one thing that she can’t do is pick up the laundry, go downstairs in the building, throw it in the washing machine, pick it up, put it in the dryer and bringing it back up on her own.

So she says, “Listen, I used to get that from the CCAC.” The CCAC says, “Here’s the assessment. We can’t do that anymore because we’re having to manage within the existing budget we’ve got. We don’t have enough money to take care of people who have more acute needs, so we’re going to take services away from those people like you who seem to be doing better in their daily life.” She was without any laundry services for a long period of time.

She went to the paper. She went to her MPP. She went to the mayor. She went to everybody in town who would listen to her, and together—the mayor, myself and others—we worked hard along with the CCAC to try to find a solution. I’m glad to say we finally got her her laundry services, but do you know how much work that was, that that woman had to go through? No citizen in this province should go through what Velma had to go through to get their washing done. That should be an automatic. Why should she have had to have gone through all of that? How many other Velmas are out in Timmins or Oakville or wherever it might be in this province, who may not be doing the kind of advocacy that Velma did for herself, who are sitting back home, not getting the services they need?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Where do they end up?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, they end up in a long-term-care facility, as Andrea Horwath says. They get sick, they get worse, they land in a hospital at \$700 to \$900 a day. We stabilize them. There are no long-term-care beds, so we put them in an ALC unit at \$700 a day, and six months to a year later they end up in a long-term-care bed. For a question of maybe 50 bucks a week, we’ve ended up costing the public system hundreds of

thousands of dollars that we wouldn’t have had to spend if we would have given the laundry services when they asked for them.

I got a call from Madame Chevalier in Kapuskasing—same kind of story. She came out of the hospital after Christmas. She has been reassessed. She has lost somebody to go do her shopping. She can’t go do her shopping; she’s physically unable to go to the grocery store to do her shopping. She says, “Listen, you’re coming into my apartment. You’re doing my housekeeping, you’re doing my bath. Can you please go and do my shopping?” No, they don’t want to do it. So we’re having to go through it again. The mayor, the MPP, the MP, Monsieur Chevalier: Everybody is going to get involved. We’re going to go through the whole process again, and I’m sure in the end we’re going to get her her groceries, but why should Madame Chevalier go through the same thing? I don’t want to spend my time over and over again—and neither do citizens of this province—trying to do what are normal things.

So we’ve put together a very practical solution. We’ve said, listen, there are ways of being able to rejig money in the budget and get some of that from the elimination of some of the tax loopholes that you’ve created for some of your business friends, and put that money into a system that says, “Within five days you can get an assessment, and get a fair assessment, so that you can get the services you need.”

That is not a cost item; that’s going to save you money because in these two cases alone, if those people don’t get or didn’t get the service they need, they’re going to fall on the health care system and cost us much more money once they end up in the institutional side.

I say what we’ve put forward is something that is practical, something that is doable, something that is achievable, something that saves us money—something that doesn’t cost us money. We’re saying to the Premier across the way, “Listen to what New Democrats and Andrea Horwath have asked for.” We’re asking for something that’s going to make a real difference in people’s lives, for people like Velma, Madame Chevalier and many other people out across the province.

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The other big issue is the youth unemployment issue. It’s the same issue no matter where you are in the province. I’m lucky; I come from a part of the province where one part of my riding is doing extremely well. If you’re in Timmins—the price of gold is \$1,600 an ounce. It’s pretty hard for the government to screw that up. It’s pretty hard for the government to do something that will hurt the mining industry when it’s \$1,600 an ounce. You guys have tried a couple of times, but \$1,600 an ounce is a way that—how would you say?—compensates for some of the mistakes that are sometimes done here at Queen’s Park.

So in a place like Timmins, you have virtually—it’s like a mini Fort McMurray. There are employment opportunities. If a person has the proper training, they’ll be able to get into a job that pays \$60,000, \$80,000,

\$150,000 a year. But it's to get that first job. And you can't blame the employer. If I'm Placer Dome or I'm Detour Lake gold or I'm De Beers or Lake Shore or whoever it might be, or one of the supply companies, you want to be able to get up and hire somebody who's got the skills that you need now. Unfortunately, those people are becoming harder and harder to find. Why? Because with the \$1,600 gold—in places like Sudbury, where base metals are doing okay, there's a lot of employment in the mining industry, plus what's happening in the oil patch. You've got a lot of people going west to get jobs in the oil patch. So the skilled, qualified people are no longer as available as they used to be.

Plus, people like me, who went through—actually, I'm one of the lucky ones; I went through the system of apprenticeship when we were hiring apprentices. But we don't hire and train apprentices the way we did before. So these companies are having a hard time trying to find electricians, mechanics, skilled tradespeople, qualified people to work on their equipment. Therefore, it is a real problem for young people to get a job, because what happens is they go knocking at the door and the employer says, "What experience do you have?" "I don't have none." "Well, come and see me when you have some." "I'd like to get some. Where do I get it?" "Well, you can't get it here because I need a skilled person now."

So we're saying, let's have a youth unemployment program, the First Start program, that helps the employer offset some of the costs of training people up to the positions that they need. For example, what happens if a company is trying to hire people—for example, Placer Dome is going to be hiring about 100 people in order to develop the new pit that they're working on in the city of Timmins. They're going to need truck drivers, they're going to need crusher operators, they're going to need all kinds of operators of different equipment, something that you can train people up to within six months to a year.

So why wouldn't we do what New Democrats are asking for and do a youth unemployment program that allows people that first start, that first job that they're going to get, or that first real job they get—not just the McDonald's minimum-wage job, but give them an opportunity to get to Placer Dome, where the company says, "Okay, I'll hire you," because we're using tax dollars smartly in order to train young people to get high-paying jobs so we can fulfill the training needs and the job needs of the employer, we can get people to make real money so that they can become citizens in our economy who are able to dream about a better tomorrow, buy a house, buy a four-wheeler, maybe take a holiday every now and then and put that money back into the economy. It's an investment in our future.

We're saying to Kathleen Wynne, we listened to the throne speech very carefully the other day. There were touch points in the throne speech that said there's something here for everyone. But what we really didn't hear is action about how this is going to happen. So we're saying to you, here are a couple of ideas that Andrea Horwath and New Democrats have put forward,

but we expect you now to work with us, if you're true to your word, and figure out how we're going to put this in place. We have some ideas how that could happen, and we're challenging the government to do that. If you don't, don't just count on our support come this budget. We want to be able to make these things happen; we ain't joking. People back home are hurting. People want some help. The Velmas out there, and the Madame Chevaliers and the young people out there who are trying to get jobs are the ones who are looking at this government and looking at this House—because it is a minority Parliament—to do what's right for them back home.

I want to talk about another aspect of this before I go to auto insurance, and that is on the question of the balanced approach to balancing the budget by 2017-18, and also the whole issue in regard to the tax loopholes. The one thing that drives me absolutely crazy is that I listen to Liberals and Conservatives talk about tax cuts as being this magical wand that they can wave over the economy and somehow or other it is just going to be the panacea to fix all the problems in the economy. We have been giving tax cut after tax cut after tax cut to the largest corporations in this province, and we really have not seen the offset in the job creation that we should be getting. What's worse is it's costing us money. We can't afford—and I listen to my Conservative friends especially say that tax cuts are a good thing. That is essentially a cost to the treasury. When you're saying, "I'm going to give a tax cut," it means to say somebody's got to pay it. If there ain't no new money coming in, it means to say you've got take it from within the budget, in other words, take it from another program, or you've got to increase the deficit.

The interesting thing was, recently—about six months ago—there was a report that came out that essentially said if you left the tax levels at what they were prior to the Liberals and Conservatives starting all these tax cuts, guess where we would be today? We'd be in a surplus position in our budget. Isn't that something?

You know, you think you would have learned from George Bush and Mitt Romney. Haven't you guys paid attention to what those guys did down there? George Bush comes to power after a balanced budget from the Clinton administration, and he gets right to work cutting taxes for the people of the United States. And what do we end up with? We end up with the United States—the highest debt per capita that they've ever seen in the history of that country, and now they're into major austerity.

So I say, my friends, that when you come to the issue of tax cuts, don't try to make it look as if that is an issue that raises money. In fact, the offset to the creation of jobs is not as great as what it was. If we were serious about using tax measures to create jobs, you would tie them to results. You would do what Andrea Horwath has said, and you would say, "Okay. All right. We want to assist the private sector in investing in the province of Ontario, and we will give you that tax cut if we have some guarantees that you're actually going to do investment in your company and that you're going to hire people, and we will make sure that you do so."

How many cases did we run through here? Through Hamilton, St. Catharines, northern Ontario—everywhere—

Ms. Andrea Horwath: London.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: London—where people were given tax cuts—

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Windsor.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Especially in Windsor, my God—and all those other places where they got tax cuts given to them. The government, federally and provincially, went and poured money into them, and then they closed up plant and they moved it off to Mexico or the United States. Isn't that nuts?

We're reusing—

Hon. Brad Duguid: Name them.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: John Deere. There's all kinds of them. Weren't you the minister in charge of that?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: What about Caterpillar there, Brad?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: How about Caterpillar in London? My God.

So the point is—

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Look what happened to GM in Oshawa. More money to Oshawa and they're moving the plant off to the United States.

So the point is, the only way that tax cuts make any sense to Ontario, from a revenue perspective, is to say tie those tax cuts to a result so that, in the end, we're able to get something for the bang for the buck.

So I just say, when we hear this mantra that tax cuts are the way to prosperity, I just say remember what it did to our budget: We ended up in a deficit today largely because of those tax cuts. Yes, because of some of the spending the Liberals did as well, but—

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Listen to Carney.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Carney has said the same thing.

Anyway, I should not engage in the heckling that's going on here. It's throwing me off. But I would just say—I should know that; I've been around here long enough. But I'm agreeing with all your heckles; that's the point. I'm with them. Especially you, Mr. Natyshak. Those are some good ones.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's encouragement.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: It's encouragement, is what it is.

But the point is—I just want to end that part on this—if you're going to do tax cuts, they've got to be targeted. They've got to be tied to results. You don't do them otherwise.

The other thing is, on this point, which really irks me—we're saying now to the private sector, "Oh, we're going to allow you to write off your entertainment costs—HST costs—as a cost of doing business." Who at home gets that kind of break? What am I getting at home if I'm an average citizen of Ontario that's going to give me that kind of thing? God, they can't even afford to go to the restaurant some of them, let alone write off the taxes on the meal that they're paying—on the entertainment.

People back home are looking for some savings, and that's one of the reasons why we raised the auto insurance issue. What's clear is this government has done much in order to reduce the cost to the auto insurers of this province, and they said at the time that would result in lower rates. What we have seen is a lessening of the benefit of accident victims and an increase to the profit of the corporation. They're allowed to make money, I make no argument with that, but there's no offset back to the person who's buying the product.

So we're saying a 15% reduction—the government, what are they saying? "Oh, yeah. Let's do some more for those poor auto insurance companies. They're hurting so bad. Let's help them along. They need another break because they've got to make more money." Okay, making money in auto insurance—I get it. Everybody's allowed to make money. But they're going to give them another break and say, "Andrea, work with us on the fraud component." Well, I agree with you that we shouldn't allow any kind of fraud in any system. But, my God, where have you been? For all of the things you've done for them now, they're already now making record profits. We have the highest rates in Ontario. We should at least give them 15%.

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So I say to my friends across the way, here's the test: We heard the throne speech, and we hear what you had to say, but you better be listening to what Ontarians are saying to you, because what we're saying as New Democrats is what they have said to us.

Now what we need to do is a little bit less talk and a little bit more walk, and if you're prepared to engage in that real discussion that allows us to bring concrete results to people back home so that people at home can feel that there's a real change for them, we're prepared to engage in that discussion. But if this is more of the same, my friends, don't count on us to be your dance partner come this spring. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Kitchener-Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: How do you follow that? That's years of experience.

I want to congratulate Premier Wynne. My first exchange with Ms. Wynne was 15 years ago, when she was head of the Metro Parent Network and I was a school community adviser across the street at the old Toronto board. At that time, we were focused on education, because we were activists and staff. People who cared about public education clearly saw that there was an attack on it, and we were fighting the PCs' create-a-crisis-in-education agenda, and we were doing that—which is ironic; I think there's some irony for me to be standing in front of you today and talking to the throne speech when education clearly is in a state of crisis in the province and trust needs to be rebuilt and there's lot of work to do on that portfolio.

That said, there were a lot of people in those times who were connecting, who were communicating, who were listening. I was listening very carefully to the throne

speech, because when the Legislature was prorogued on October 15, we immediately got to work, the NDP did. We went out and we listened to people. We listened to the communities that we serve, because good ideas come from people when you listen to them and when they see that there's true engagement. As we developed our policy and platforms and our priorities that we put forward ahead of the budget discussion in a very open and transparent way—people see their ideas and themselves reflected in this party, and that's good for democracy. It's good to build trust up in the province of Ontario.

I come from a town with two universities and a college, so I've spent a lot of time talking to youth in Kitchener-Waterloo, and actually the entire region. There is a despondency. People are desperate. They are losing hope. After going through post-secondary education, which has not been made any more affordable under the Liberal government, and graduating with heavy debt loads, they're looking at the job market and they're saying, "Where are the jobs? How am I going to put my education into action to make this province a stronger place?" Around those jobs round tables, really good ideas came forward.

Students need experience. They want experience in the not-for-profit sector. They want to experience the applied trades, skilled trades. They're looking to make a difference in the province of Ontario, and the doors are being shut. We put forward a very good idea. The First Start jobs plan is strong. It has been proven to work. Obama has applied it to the States and with some success. If you have a good idea that works, you should apply it. Incentivizing the private sector to create job opportunities for youth in the province of Ontario is something that can work and it should work. It should be applied, and we should have heard it, actually, in the throne speech, because it works.

We're supposed to be working together, so I hope that, as we move forward, the youth jobs employment strategy that we've put forward, that clearly has been ignored from this side of the House, will be put into action, because I think that the people of this province appreciate the fact that there is some collaboration, there is some collaborative talk. There is a lot of talk about conversation, but I think that those conversations need to be active listening in that they lead to action, and we need action on jobs for youth in the province of Ontario.

I do want to say, though, that there was a moment of hope, actually, in the throne speech which talked about moving the issue of those with disabilities into an actionable item where we can actually put people who have disabilities to work. I think that that was a long time overdue, and I think this is a shared goal that we have in our party as well. As a demonstration of the commitment, the government will shift the Accessibility Directorate from the Ministry of Community and Social Services to the Ministry of Economic Development. When you talk to people in the communities, we are not reaching our potential from an economic development perspective, because those who are very qualified and very dedicated

to change just cannot break into the jobs market. I'm looking forward to having those conversations, but in a very real and tangible way.

Today the front page of the paper has to do with full-day kindergarten and how that program rolled out. I think that this is a good learning opportunity. Since we're in a minority setting, we should be trying to learn from each other. When the full-day kindergarten rolled out, clearly, the whole child care sector was left sort of hanging. I mean, it's a fragmented, broken system. We can do way better in the province of Ontario. The full-day kindergarten actually destabilized child care, and it was only when we came to the table through the last budget session last spring that we were able to provide some transition funding to stabilize that.

But there are good ideas out there. There are innovative, creative ideas that are happening in the province of Ontario. For instance, the Waterloo Region District School Board, where I was once chair—when the full-day kindergarten happened and when the Liberals backed off the idea of the Pascal vision for early learning and care, before and after, we decided to go ahead with that program. They backed off, because it takes some courage to be innovative and it takes some courage to be creative. To date, actually, that school board has created 1,600 child care spaces at no cost to the taxpayer through the current infrastructure that exists in our schools, and the more people that go into that program, the less cost it is for parents. That's a good idea. It was a good idea. You know, good ideas are good ideas, but you have to implement them with some integrity and with some dignity, I think.

I think the potential for us moving forward, if there's true listening on auto insurance—the other day I was in a coffee shop and I met a fellow. He's paying the same amount for auto insurance that his car is worth. Seniors cannot take it anymore; actually, nobody can take it anymore. The cost for auto insurance continues to rise. There is a breaking point. People cannot afford for those costs to keep going up when they are the safest drivers in Canada. Ontario is one of the safest provinces for drivers.

So we can do more, and these are affordability issues that the NDP is absolutely committed to. If there's room, and there should be room, we should be able to actually lower the cost for every driver in the province of Ontario in a tangible way going forward with this budget.

Auto insurance, home care—you know, I was recently knocking on doors, as many of you know, in the by-election. You remember that by-election, right? It was a good by-election. I know a lot of you were there. It's fun, but you know, when you knock on doors, you actually have conversations with people about their lived experience. The seniors in Kitchener-Waterloo need access to affordable home care. They need it in a timely way. Seniors have worked their entire lives to strengthen our communities and here they are, at the end of their days, getting to a certain point where maintaining integrity in their lives is becoming a real challenge. You can judge a society on the way we treat our children and the way we

treat our seniors—and then you have to build in those supports in the middle, and we can do better for seniors.

I think our five-day home care guarantee is something that will work and it should work for the people of this province, and it should be an integral part of the health care conversation, as our leader and Mr. Bisson actually pointed out. This is early intervention. It's prevention. It's smart and strategic investment of tax dollars. It isn't wasteful. It's ensuring that seniors can stay in their homes and not end up in a hospital and not end up in a long-term-care facility, if they could even get into those facilities.

The work before us is profound. We're in a tough spot. I think a balanced approach to addressing the \$12-billion deficit has to be applied in a very real way. I'm looking forward to the committees to start. In the last session, there were no committees. There was no true exchange between the parties in a real, tangible way. I'm looking forward to going to finance. When you follow the money, you follow the real priorities of a government. So, I'm looking forward to following the money and to see really where the focus is, because people do not appreciate the fact that corporate tax loopholes are a prevalent part of the culture of this place, and based on the jobs and round tables that I've been part of, they think that if a small business creates a job, they should get a tax incentive. They should be rewarded for being part of the solution. Getting tax breaks for drinking and entertaining, that is not a priority for us in this place, and we need to address that in a real, tangible way.

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So there's promise here; we've been very clear. The last budget consultation process was problematic on a number of levels, and yet we've put out some very clear strategies and priorities; they're the priorities of the people that we've consulted with. We've brought those priorities to the government. I think if there's a true sense of working together, if we do want to rebuild confidence in our economy, in our health care and in our education system, then the opportunity is there. But it has to not just be lip service; it has to be, as I said, active listening that leads to action. I look forward to being part of that conversation.

We have the ability to make positive change, and I look forward to working with the economic development minister and the infrastructure minister, because those are two issues that are new to me. Over the last six months I've learned a lot about culverts and waste water management and nuclear plants and gas plants. In fact, I toured a gas plant, and apparently you can actually build a gas plant in a community, you just have to be truly consultative, and part of the process has to have some integrity to it. But the energy portfolio, I think, is also a challenge that will connect all of our priorities around building strong communities, around growing the economy, around creating jobs. That's going to be part of the interesting process as we move forward.

The corporate tax loopholes, though—this is something that the people of the province have no patience for.

The more they learn about how we treat corporations versus how we treat your average Ontarian who's just trying to get by, there's no patience for it and there's no tolerance for it. There really shouldn't be any tolerance for it.

I'm just thinking back to my last job creator session—a consultation process. The private sector does want to be part of the solution, they do, but they need some help. Providing a wage subsidy to bring youth into the workplace is actually something that has proven to be very successful. They want to be part of the solution and they want to be part of the training process.

At this one session, the president of Conestoga College mentioned that there's a real opportunity here to build in the skilled trades, the applied skills that we need for infrastructure and for the economy, and not to stream everyone through an education system that doesn't lead to a job. I think that if we are smarter about our investment in post-secondary education, if we're cognizant of the connection between that educational experience and the true economy—the new economy, if you will, which is built on knowledge but also needs the applied skills—then we can make real progress. That's what progressive sectors have been able to do. They've measured the gap in services, because right now we have graduates without jobs and we have a gap in the jobs economy. There's room for improvement on those things, and as I said, I'm looking forward to following the money, because if you follow the money, you follow the priorities.

Interjection: What about auto insurance rates?

Ms. Catherine Fife: The auto insurance rates, yes; there's no doubt that people recognize that that's a real, tangible thing that they see every single day: the cost of their auto insurance going up—actually their home insurance as well. But if you're a safe driver, if you've never had an accident, you continually get penalized, and you watch the profit margin of those auto insurance companies continue to rise and then you can genuinely recognize that it's a true unfair equation. That's why we've put that forward. This is something that can be done and it should be done. I know that there's an excuse over on this side of the margin, which speaks specifically to fraud. We need to address that. But it's a small proportion to the continued increase of auto insurance rates.

The affordability issue is an idea that translates across the entire province. If you're in the north, if you're in the rural communities, if you're living in an urban centre—they see the cost of living continue to rise and they want us, in this House, to work together to find some solutions, but they want to see that balanced approach as well. You know, you can see, when you lose that sense of balance—and that actually happened during Bill 115. I mean, there was no balance to that conversation. It was—well, there was no conversation, there really wasn't.

Interjection: There was a crisis.

Ms. Catherine Fife: There was a crisis—well, it was a manufactured crisis, which is unfortunate, because when politicians and political parties put their own needs ahead of the needs of the people we're elected to serve,

nobody wins. I mean, clearly, we saw that first-hand. The work before us is huge on that portfolio, because education drives the economy.

And, you know, there's a very good example. In the throne speech, there was some mention around First Nations education and closing the gap for First Nations. You know, First Nations, Métis, Inuit—this is a growing demographic in the province of Ontario. There's a complete lack of leadership at the national level. We can be part of the solution, and there's a cost to us to say, "Oh, that's their issue." I think we've been very clear in this party that the approach going forward needs to be balanced, it needs to be strategic, and it needs to be based on some basic principles of social justice—yes, I said "social justice." It's true: social justice works.

So in conclusion, I think that this has been an interesting experience on the whole to listen to the language of the throne speech and to find some common consensus. Language is language, and language can be very powerful, but the real power in this House will come when we actually do something, when we work together, and if not—I mean, there are some very clear choices. Our leader has been very clear. We need to get results for Ontarians. We need to get results for the people who sent us here. And we do need to look at all of those opportunities in a very holistic way: from youth employment, from retraining for a workforce that has actually been squeezed out of the manufacturing sector; the continued need to modernize the manufacturing sector; and to be creative and innovative.

There are huge missed opportunities from an agricultural perspective. The new economy is food, and we should be creating jobs that are local, that contribute to the overall health of our communities. The potential has not been tapped into at all, because we've been so focused on lowering those corporate tax rates, which actually don't create jobs. If they did, then we would be in a very different place right now. That dead money that Mr. Carney has referenced—we need to find a way, and I hope a very strategic way, to stimulate the economy, to grow the economy so that there is some justice in this province, so that every community has the potential to reach their potential.

So in conclusion, let's get to work. That's why we're here. We're here to work for the people of the province of Ontario. They expect more from us, and they should expect more from us, and we're going to be very clear and honest in that conversation going forward.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate? Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I move adjournment of the debate.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Agreed?

Debate adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Orders of the day?

Hon. John Milloy: No further business, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The government House leader has indicated no further business. This House stands recessed until 10:30 a.m.

The House recessed from 0959 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Michael Harris: I'd like to welcome Scott Thurlow and Andrea Kent from the Canadian Renewable Fuels Association, sitting in the members' gallery. Welcome to question period.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Northumberland–Quinte West. Sorry—Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

Mr. Bill Walker: Thank you, Speaker. It's always good to get two mentions in there.

I would like to introduce an intern working in my office, Domna Theodorou. She's a U of T criminology student and is doing a fabulous job. Welcome to the Queen's Park question period.

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: I'd like to announce that St. Clement school is here today, visiting the Legislature—the grade 5 class. I know they're going to enjoy a very calm, cool and collected Legislature, right, sir? Welcome to St. Clement.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I would like to introduce Alan Krolik, who's here. He's from the city of Toronto but he's a Facebook friend and he really enjoys being at Queen's Park. I want to say thanks for coming here today.

Mr. Michael Prue: I'd like to introduce the family of page Luisa, who is here from Beaches–East York: her mother, Dori Antolin; her father, Bruce Grant; her grandmother Anne Grant; and her grandfather Michael Antolin. They're all up there in the public gallery. I hope you're having a good time today.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I'm delighted to welcome Murray and Marilyn Heintz from Burlington, who are here today, as well as Gloria Reszler, who is here from York–Simcoe region.

Mr. Joe Dickson: I'd like to take the opportunity to welcome Ajax–Pickering's page, Jessica Kostuch, and her family to Queen's Park. Her mom and dad, Christine and Jim, and her siblings—brother Matthew, a former page of ours, and sister Kristen—are joining us in the Legislature today, and we welcome all of them.

Hon. Michael Coteau: Please join me in welcoming Nick Pessos, who is in the east members' gallery today. He's a good friend of mine who grew up in the beautiful riding of Don Valley East. Welcome to the Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Today, it's my turn to introduce—in the Speaker's gallery, from the great riding of Brant, we have at Queen's Park—from Stoney Creek, we have Bill Stathakos, Josh Stathakos and Rose Stathakos; and from Brant, Lacey MacDonald-Moore and Heather MacDonald-Moore. Welcome to Queen's Park.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I would ask all members to join me in welcoming the group of pages. If they could assemble, please, we'll do our introductions. They've got it all down pat. This group loves to smile.

These are the legislative pages serving in the second session of the 40th Parliament: Luisa Antolin Grant, from Beaches–East York; Rhea Basu, from Oak Ridges–Markham; Jaden Dilda, from Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale; Daniel Forestell, from Eglinton–Lawrence; Lauren George, from Niagara Falls; Alexander Giordano, from Etobicoke Centre; Vanessa Gomez, from Burlington; John Hiemstra, from Ottawa–Orléans; Jenna Hirji, from Richmond Hill; A.J. Jonker from Dufferin–Caledon; Jessica Kostuch from Ajax–Pickering; Joshua Limpert from St. Paul's; Daniella Mikanovsky from Thornhill; Justin O'Brien from Pickering–Scarborough East; Olivia Oraziotti from Sault Ste. Marie—I said that deliberately—Joe Sammon from Simcoe–Grey; Jessica Seifried from Mississauga South; William Strathdee from Perth–Wellington; Stacey Thomas from Scarborough Southwest; Stephanie Tom from Willowdale; Charlie Violin from Halton; Josh Vito from Kitchener–Waterloo; Angela Wang from Scarborough–Agincourt; Jasmine Wilson from Mississauga–Erindale. These are our pages.

MEMBER FOR YORK CENTRE

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): While we're in an uplifted mood, I would like to ask the House to join me in congratulating the member from York Centre. Monte Kwinter, who has almost 28 years of service in this House, recently achieved a significant milestone in the history of the Legislative Assembly. On January 25, at the age of 81 years and 310 days, Mr. Kwinter became the most elderly person ever to serve in the sitting of the Ontario Legislature.

I think that, in respect of this milestone, I would give the member an opportunity to make comment.

Interjection: Speech. Speech,

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I would give the member an opportunity to respond.

Mr. Monte Kwinter: Thank you very much. Really, I'm pleased to have this recognition, because for the last three or four weeks everybody thought that it was my birthday. It had nothing to do with my birthday; it has to do with the fact that on October 6, I became the oldest member ever to be elected to the Legislature and the fourth-oldest to serve. On December 20, 2011, I became the third-oldest to serve; on April 16, 2012, I became the second-oldest to serve; and on January 25, I became the oldest member in the history of the Parliament.

Now, the interesting thing about that is that every single day I set a new milestone, because the people that I've surpassed are frozen in time. They're not going anywhere, because they've been dead for about 25 years, so every day that I survive, I set a new milestone.

I want to say that I'm in my 28th year, after eight elections, and I still enjoy every minute of it. Just so you know, I expect to run in the next election. I thank you for your good wishes.

Applause.

1040

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pretty hard to top that.

Mr. Monte Kwinter: Mr. Speaker, if I may, I'd like to just read a quote that appeared in one of the local newspapers, that I got a kick out of. It says, "Monte Kwinter was uplifting"—this was a profile that was done of me. It said, "At age 81 years of age, Mr. Kwinter has more energy and desire to serve than people half his age."

"The ... community and his political colleagues owe Monte Kwinter a debt of gratitude. They do not make them like him anymore."

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Well, all I have to say is this is the kind of heckling I can tolerate.

Not to try to top Mr. Kwinter, and I suspect that we will not be charged with ageism, because I suspect that both parties will submit candidates to run against you—

Mr. John Yakabuski: We've got a couple of septuagenarians here.

Laughter.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): One might think that I've lost control, but I can get it back.

USE OF QUESTION PERIOD

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): On a serious note, before we begin question period today, I want to make reference to two matters that I touched on yesterday.

First, a reminder that questions asked and answers given must relate to government policy. While I am quite aware that there are political manoeuvrings inherent in the business that we conduct here, we should strive, as much as possible, to preserve the proceedings here that are intended to be. Question period is an opportunity to question and defend government policy.

Secondly, yesterday there were questions that came perilously close to anticipating an outcome of a live matter of privilege before the House. The point raised by the member from Prince Edward–Hastings is being considered by the Speaker and a ruling will be delivered in the fullness of time. In the meantime, the matter is not appropriate subject for questions or debate. So I've made that quite clear for all of us to try to stay as close to as possible.

POWER PLANTS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Energy on a point of order.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to inform the House that yesterday evening, I was informed by the Deputy Minister of Energy that he was informed last evening that the Ontario Power Authority has un-

covered additional pages related to the legislative committee's request—

Interjections.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: —and this morning I had the occasion to—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: It's a cover-up.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member will withdraw that statement.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I will withdraw that statement.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. Minister?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Thank you, Speaker. And this morning I had the occasion to speak with the chair of the board of the OPA—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Renfrew, come to order.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: —and encouraged timely and complete transparency.

The documents in question are being compiled as I speak and will be tabled with the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly as soon as possible this afternoon.

Also, I have asked the board chair to explain how these additional records were uncovered and indeed address how they were overlooked. The chair and CEO will be making themselves available to answer questions in the media studio this afternoon. Their top priority at this time is to complete the documents and submit them to the Legislature. The people of Ontario have the right to expect that the express will of this Legislature will be carried out with utmost diligence.

Mr. Speaker, we are committed to working with the opposition and with you to make this minority Parliament work. Members on all sides have a responsibility to make Parliament productive to build a stronger, healthier and fairer society for Ontarians. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm not asking for quiet for you to continue.

It is now time for oral questions.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. Tim Hudak: Let me first, on behalf of the PC caucus, extend congratulations to the member for York Centre for his longevity. It's an extraordinary record. The fact that he could pull an off-the-cuff speech like that is a testament to the skills he has shown, obviously, in his time in politics.

Speaker, before I get to my question, I also want to express my extreme disappointment to Premier Wynne and her cabinet that, after only three days in this House—

this kind of trick, this kind of tactic shows how much the new government looks like the Dalton McGuinty government.

Let me ask the Premier a very direct question. Premier, the Liberal government brought in a wage freeze on teachers last October called Bill 115. In hindsight, do you think the legislated wage freeze was a mistake?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I've been very clear that we understood and we understand that constraint around compensation and wages was important. That's why the legislation was brought in. We worked to negotiate, to come to negotiated settlements. That didn't work. The legislation was brought in, as we said we would do in our budget last year.

Mr. Speaker, the reality is that I believe, and I believe that our party believes, that a negotiated settlement, a collective bargaining process is the best way to come to a contract. That is our preferred methodology, and as we've demonstrated in the broader public sector, that strategy is working. We will continue to work with our partners to come to collectively bargained contracts.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'm not sure we got a straight answer there, Premier. I think you said that you do support Bill 115, that you do not believe that was a mistake. Bill 115 was a legislated wage increase because, as you mentioned, your preferred method of negotiation was not effective.

You indicated yesterday that you are now backing away from the option of a legislated wage freeze. You did not mention the words "wage freeze" at all in your throne speech on Tuesday. So I want to ask you, Premier, if you encounter a situation like Bill 115 again, where you can't negotiate a zero-and-zero increase, will you bring in a legislated wage freeze to ensure that we don't blow a bigger hole in the current budget?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, we can deal in hypotheticals. The reality is that we are working with our broader public sector. We are bringing in collective agreements that are zero increases. We are working with the people who deliver services in the province, and that is—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward-Hastings, come to order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: That is the major difference between us and them. We really believe that it's possible to have working relationships. We really believe that it is possible to respect the collective bargaining process.

We brought in Bill 115 after months of working to come to a collectively bargained agreement, which we did with 55,000 employees. The process was not what we would have liked it to be, Mr. Speaker. That's why we've been in conversation over the last few weeks with our education partners.

But the reality is that we're getting those zero increases. We are putting in place the constraints. That's happening, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: The Premier says that you're achieving that; actually, you're not. During prorogation, CUPE had an 8% increase in Halton Healthcare; Nipissing University faculty had a 6% increase during prorogation when you suspended the Legislature; and in January, Windsor police received an 11.5% per cent wage increase.

One of the reasons I'm convinced that you can get wage increases is because you have to hold, in your hand, a legislative wage freeze if you cannot achieve so through negotiations. That was the approach, I would argue, that helped actually to get a wage freeze with teachers at the end of the day.

But what I'm hearing you saying is you're taking that off the table. You are no longer contemplating any option of a legislated wage increase. I want to make sure I'm clear: You abandoned a wage freeze in your throne speech. You basically demoted the Minister of Education, who had the wage freeze in the last—for the teachers' round. So I think actions speak louder than words.

Are you, Premier, taking off the table the legislated wage freeze? Yes or no?

1050

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I actually think it's very important for the government of Ontario to have good working relationships with other levels of government, Mr. Speaker. It's an absolutely critical and vital part of the work that we do as a government.

It is critical to us that we have the kind of wage constraints that we are, in fact, achieving with our broader public service employees. The average increase has been 0.2% over the last 12 months. We are achieving success on that front. I would have thought that the Leader of the Opposition would have applauded that, that he would have said that is a good thing, because he recognizes that we need to be fiscally responsible and that we need that kind of constraint as well.

We will continue to work with the people who deliver services in this province, Mr. Speaker. That is our philosophy, and it is working.

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. Tim Hudak: The current budget plan—that brought forward by previous Finance Minister Duncan—had a wage freeze in it. He estimated that would bring in savings of \$6 billion a year. It's the same figure that we brought forward: \$2 billion a year, \$6 billion over three years. Minister Duncan, at the time, was clear that he couldn't negotiate a wage freeze, that your government would bring in wage-freeze legislation. We supported that when it came to Bill 115. We thought it wasn't the best approach, but it was the right thing to do at the time.

Since then, the minister responsible was demoted from cabinet, you tossed that legislation overboard, and the public sector union leadership left all smiles from the throne speech.

I don't want to leave you twisting in the wind here. I really think that taxpayers—the 85% who aren't on the government payroll—deserve a straight answer, yes or no: Are you ruling out altogether a legislated pay freeze to make sure that we don't blow a \$6-billion hole in the budget plan?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We are actually on track. We're ahead of schedule to eliminate the deficit by 2017-18, Mr. Speaker. So what we are doing is working; it is absolutely working. We are committed to that 2017-18 date, and as I say, we are ahead of schedule on that.

So we're going to continue to work with the people who deliver services in this province, whether it's in the health care sector, whether it's in the education sector, whether it's other government services. We're going to work with those people because they interact with the people of the province, and they make sure that their children have strong and enriched classrooms. They make sure that our hospitals and our health care facilities, our long-term-care homes, are in the best shape possible. So I think it only makes sense that a government would work with the people who deliver those services and that there would be a respectful relationship with them. I know, Mr. Speaker, that that distinguishes us from the path that the Leader of the Opposition would have us take.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Speaker, the Premier speaks of a respectful relationship. But what about a respectful relationship for the 85% of people who are not on the government payroll, who have had six-, seven-year pay freezes, who have lost jobs, the 600,000 people who woke up this morning with no job to go to and no job to go to tomorrow?

We've got a vision of a stronger Ontario, Speaker, one that is prosperous, that is leading Canada in job creation again. In order to get there, we have to have our books back in balance. We have to make sure we send a signal to investors that our fiscal house is in order.

So I'll ask the Premier one last time, because it's almost as difficult to get an answer from her as it was from Premier McGuinty: If you're not going to bring in a legislated wage freeze, what initiatives are you going to bring in to balance the budget? If you're not going to bring in the power of a wage-freeze legislation, how do you plan to actually balance the budget, because you had no ideas in the throne speech to reduce spending?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I have said, we are on schedule; we're ahead of schedule on the balancing of the budget—2017-18. We are overachieving on those markers, Mr. Speaker. We will continue to find those efficiencies, we will continue to constrain those increases in wages, and we will continue to work towards that balanced budget of 2017-18.

Let me just say, Mr. Speaker, I'm pretty sure that the 85% of people that the Leader of the Opposition is talking about are people who have children in our schools. I'm pretty sure they are people who have loved ones in our hospitals. I'm pretty sure that they are people

who need services delivered by government. Those people deserve our respect as well—the Leader of the Opposition is absolutely right—but the respect they deserve is that we work to create jobs, that we work with the private sector, that we make sure small businesses have access to capital, that we make sure we have the infrastructure in place so that business will come to the province so those jobs will be created. That's the respect that is due to the people of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Disturbingly, Speaker, I think the Premier misses the entire point. It is these things that are most at risk. It is our kids' classroom education. It is our health care system. It is putting new cancer-busting drugs in the formulary. All those things are at risk if you don't get the books back in balance, if you don't get out of the debt trap in the first place. That's what's at risk, let alone creating jobs in our province.

The Premier's been disturbingly evasive on a simple yes or no question: if she's going to bring a legislative wage freeze or not. It sounds like she's abandoning that. So I want to see her mindset on where she is going to go then on wage negotiations.

When you were Minister of Education, you brought in a 10% increase for teachers at a time that the province of Ontario was facing a \$20-billion deficit, at a time that wages were frozen, that people in the private sector were out of work. You thought it fair and reasonable to bring in a 10% increase for teachers. In hindsight, Premier, do you think a 10% increase for teachers in that fiscal reality was the right move or was it a mistake?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: In hindsight, the accomplishments that our students achieved when I was Minister of Education and when this government has been in power, Mr. Speaker, are second to none in the English-speaking world—absolutely none.

In hindsight, the fact that when we came into office after the party opposite had been in office and 68% of kids were graduating from high school—and now 82% of students are graduating from high school. That's tens of thousands of students who have the ability now to go on to post-secondary, who have the ability to become an apprentice. They have a brighter future because of the work that the people on this side of the House have done. So, in hindsight, I will just say that I am so proud of the legacy of this government on education.

POWER PLANTS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, I, on behalf of New Democrats, also want to congratulate the member from York Centre on his fantastic length of service here in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It's something I don't know that we can all strive for but certainly something that we're all proud of you for having achieved. There's no doubt about that.

Speaker, my first question is to the Premier, and it's a pretty simple question: When did the Premier know that

the OPA had other documents that were not released to the people of this Legislature in terms of the gas plant scandals that have been unfolding for the last year or so?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you for the question. I learned last night that there were documents. So, well into the night, the Minister of Energy and I were speaking.

This is an ongoing process. It's very complicated. I know that the chair of the OPA will be speaking to the media today about that ongoing process. This is why, Mr. Speaker, from the first day of my campaign for leadership I have said that I want all the information that is available, that is asked for by the committee—I want all that information to be available. I want there to be an all-party committee. I have said I will appear before the committee. It's why I asked the Auditor General to look at both gas plants. I want the information to be available.

The fact that there is more information—it's disappointing that we didn't know about it, but we want all that information to be out in the public.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, this has been an ongoing process of obfuscation of the facts by this government. That's what the ongoing process has been.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. I would ask the member to withdraw.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I will withdraw, Speaker.

The bottom line is this: The energy minister announced just a moment ago that, for a second time, a government agency has uncovered yet more documents on the cancelled gas plants, documents that this government has insisted repeatedly did not exist. They didn't exist the first time; apparently they didn't exist this time either.

Does the Premier have any explanation whatsoever for the people of this province or any justification on how this kind of thing can happen in a democratic society like Ontario?

1100

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, look, it is not obviously—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The members from Durham, Leeds–Grenville and Prince Edward–Hastings, come to order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I would obviously prefer, Mr. Speaker, to have been able to say that every single document, every single piece of electronic material that was created, has been found. It is an ongoing process, and I wish that a different decision had been made at the very beginning of this process and we were not having this conversation. But the fact is, a decision was made. All of the parties agreed that there should be a different decision, and now there are documents that are part of a complicated search process. The Legislature asked for those documents.

What would really be a problem, Mr. Speaker, is if those documents did not come forward. The fact is, they are coming forward. It's unfortunate that we didn't know

that there were more, but they are coming forward, and that's as it should be.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, I have to say that we all know what complicates a search process, and that's when somebody decides that they don't want documents to be found. That's the problem here in Ontario.

The government insisted that all documents had been disclosed. Then more were discovered. Then they made the same claim again, that now all documents had been exposed, and now more, again, have been discovered.

Is there any reason, at this point in time, that anybody in this province should believe the government has any credibility whatsoever on the issue of the moved gas plants in Mississauga and Oakville? Why should anybody buy their story now?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: So, my story is that we're going to work to find every single—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew, come to order. The member from Durham, come to order. The member from Halton, come to order. If you'll notice, I've started naming the ridings. The next move is a warning.

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I have said from the first day of my leadership campaign that one of my priorities was to make sure that every single piece of information that was available—and remember, we're not talking about boxes of paper, we are talking—

Interjection: Yes, you are.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: No, we are not talking about boxes of paper, we are talking about electronic information that has to be searched out. And so, as you search—and this is my understanding of what the OPA has been doing in an ongoing way, looking for those pieces of information—that is an ongoing process. That is exactly what has been happening and what will continue to happen, because the Legislature has asked for that information. We will work and make sure that every piece of information that is asked for is available, and that is as it should be.

POWER PLANTS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the Premier of our province sat at the cabinet table while all of this unfolded over the last several months. The Premier of our province was the co-chair of the Liberal campaign when these decisions were being made. The Premier of our province might have a nice talk to talk to us about, in terms of her campaign promises when she ran for the leadership of her party, but the bottom line is, the people of this province deserve the answers to why these documents have been without the view of the members of this Legislature, as was their right, for months and months and months. I want to know from this Premier why anybody in Ontario

should have any trust whatsoever in any Liberal in this province.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We are going to do everything in our power to make sure that every piece of information that we can get our hands on is available to the committee. That's why I want to have an all-party committee—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Cambridge, come to order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —that's why I've agreed to come and appear before the committee. That's why I asked the Auditor General to look at both gas plant decisions.

We are very aware that this is an ongoing process—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Lanark, come to order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —and that there will continue to be a search for the documentation that the committee is going to be looking for, and that's as it should be, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, I want to quote from a letter that was sent by the Ontario Power Authority on October 12, 2012: "On behalf of the Ontario Power Authority, I would like to apologize to the members of both the estimates committee and the provincial Legislature. It was always our intention to provide all responsive records and to respect the ruling of the Speaker....

"The documents today are the result of a comprehensive and thorough search."

This was on October 12, 2012.

My question to the Premier is, how many documents are going to be dumped this afternoon?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): You are warned. To be clear: the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex.

Minister.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to share with the House—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Lanark is warned.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: I'm pleased to share with the House exactly what happened last evening. I was informed at about 6:30 p.m. by the Deputy Minister of Energy that he had just been informed by the CEO of OPA that they had additional documents, which they were going to disclose today.

Very early this morning, I spoke to the chair of OPA and wanted to find out exactly what was happening. I expressed to the chair that there needs to be total transparency, total honesty, total disclosure and, more so, that

they be prepared to come here to Queen's Park in the media studio and be totally, fully transparent with the public on the issue of disclosure of documents.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Yesterday members of this government got up and acted all indignant because the opposition was doing their job, trying to hold them to account on the most vile scandal that has faced this province in a long time. They were indignant, and they accused us—they accused the opposition—of being mean-spirited. Well, I accuse them of being disingenuous, Speaker. This is absolutely—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I ask the member to withdraw.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I'll withdraw.

Speaker, the bottom line is this: Who knows how many more months will go by before yet more documents are discovered? I think that the only thing that will solve this problem here in Ontario is a public inquiry. Will the Premier agree to it?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: In my conversation with the chair of OPA this morning, they confirmed to me that both the chair and the CEO would be pleased to attend the committee that was established yesterday and make themselves available to answer any questions. They're also willing to accept a third-party facilitator to work with the House leaders of this Legislature and the OPA, to have full, 100% assurance that all documents have been released, to the best of their knowledge.

POWER PLANTS

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is to the Premier. We've just witnessed a shocking revelation from the Minister of Energy today that there are still thousands of documents yet to be produced relating to this gas plant fiasco. They've suddenly just appeared out of thin air, as if by magic.

No one is buying this, Premier. You and many other cabinet ministers have repeatedly stood in this House and assured us that we've had all of the documents relating to this scandal—not once, not twice, but now three times. This is outrageous.

Premier, will you honour your promise and immediately establish a select committee to get to the bottom of this absolutely scandalous mess?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: The new Premier acknowledged from day one the concern that this Legislature had about the gas plant issue.

When I was reappointed as House leader, I met with my counterparts and we discussed two ways to move forward. One, a select committee that would have a broad mandate and come back with a comprehensive—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Oxford, come to order

Hon. John Milloy: —and, I suspect, more useful report to this Legislature.

The second, Mr. Speaker, was to continue with a mean-spirited, vengeful attack upon a former member of this Legislature, someone who served with distinction—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward—Hastings is warned.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, as House leader—we put the choice before the opposition parties, and yesterday morning we saw the results of that choice, with a committee that has been struck, the justice committee. Of course, we will abide by the ruling of this Legislature and co-operate fully with that committee and its investigation.

1110

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: The time for playing games in this matter is long past. I have in my hand a copy of a letter that the Premier wrote to the Leader of the Opposition and to the leader of the third party on February 14, promising to establish a select committee into this matter, with no strings attached. Later, we heard there are strings: We are required to exchange a member's rights of privilege in order to have the select committee. That is not acceptable to us, nor is it acceptable to the people of Ontario. Premier, you have a duty to this House. You have a duty to Ontarians. Will you do the right thing, honour your promise and establish the select committee now?

Hon. John Milloy: At no time was it ever proposed that the rights or privileges of a member would be removed. The simple fact is, there was a vote yesterday, and the proposal that was made to the opposition is that we had two choices to go—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Durham will withdraw.

Mr. John O'Toole: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

The member from Leeds—Grenville, I'm not sure if I have you on my list yet, but you're there. You have a warning.

Government House leader?

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, the question was, would they support the motion that was anticipated to come forward yesterday and did, or would they move forward with our proposal? The opposition made their choice, but again, I always think it's important to put this whole issue in context and remind people that every single party in this House opposed those gas plants. In fact, the Progressive Conservative Party made it a centrepiece of their 2011 election platform—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

POWER PLANTS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier, and I have to say, I stand with complete shock at the remarks of the government House leader. The bottom line is that the decisions were made by this government in order to save Liberal seats in the last election. They spent billions of dollars—likely, possibly; we don't know yet, because we don't have the documents—on making sure that those Liberal seats were saved. New Democrats have been very clear that we don't follow the Liberal way when it comes to private power deals. That's our policy; that's where we stand. We've always stood there. They can't have it both ways, on one hand make these deals and then decide that they're going to benefit from them when they have to break the deal to gain seats in this Legislature. That is the history of this mess.

My question to the Premier is this: When are we going to see all of the documents, and when is the Premier going to admit to her role in this schlimazel?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: I think it's important—there may be another walk down memory lane for the leader of the New Democratic Party. "New Democrats actually have thought for a long time that that plant should never have been built and we've said so," said the leader of the third party, in Hansard, October 18, 2010.

The member for Toronto—Danforth told Inside Halton on October 7, 2010, "I don't agree with the Oakville power plant. I don't think it is necessary."

The member for Beaches—East York told this Legislature on December 2, 2010, "I'm glad that the people of Oakville came to their senses. I'm glad the people of Oakville hired Erin Brockovich and did all the things that they did in order to have this killed."

Mr. Speaker, the opposition cannot have it both ways. They cannot go out and campaign against them and then stand here today in shock and horror that they were cancelled. Every party in this Legislature supported the cancellation of those plants.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: What a disgraceful display of deflection by the government House leader. Shame on him and shame on this government. The Premier has all but admitted that she has no idea if there are more documents that are yet to be uncovered. It seems to me that there is only one thing that we can do that's in the best interests of the people of this province and that is to have a public inquiry.

I stand in my spot, Speaker, and I ask for unanimous consent for a public inquiry into the moving of the gas plants in Mississauga and Oakville.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): A little unorthodox, but is there consent?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I heard a no. Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I repeat again: The new Premier—and certainly in her marching orders to

me, as the reappointed House leader—put forward the fact that we wanted to fully acknowledge the concern that existed over the gas plant issue. We discussed the idea of a mechanism, such as an all-party committee, that could look at all aspects of this. Yes, Mr. Speaker, we thought that was a preferable way than a mean-spirited, vindictive motion against a former member of this Legislature, who served with distinction as the Minister of Energy and in a number of other portfolios.

We left that ultimate choice up to the opposition. Yesterday morning, we saw their choice. Again, although we disagreed with it, I want to state that we will co-operate fully with the committee as it undertakes its work.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. Grant Crack: My question is to the Minister of Community and Social Services. Minister, I meet regularly with constituents in GPR and they often tell me how they value our social assistance system right here in Ontario. Those that are in receipt of supports from either Ontario Works and/or the Ontario Disability Support Program tell me that the programs have helped them in their time of need. Others, who have been fortunate to avoid needing these programs, tell me that they are proud to know that Ontario has a strong social safety net.

Minister, in 2010, your ministry announced a review of the social assistance programs. This was an important announcement, and, Speaker, I believe a review of the system hasn't been conducted in over 20 years.

Minister, I know that the commission to review social assistance in Ontario released their final report at the end of last year. I'm wondering if you could tell us today why the review was undertaken in the first place and what are some of the findings that the commissioners made.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I'm pleased with the member's interest and will do the best I can to answer his very good question. I'm very happy to tell him and this whole House that upgrading and improving our social assistance system, using recommendations from Frances Lankin and Munir Sheikh, is a priority of our Premier and for this government. In fact, the Premier has directed the secretary of cabinet to work with my ministry to in fact develop an implementation plan, and I look forward to working on that.

The report makes it clear that there are no simple answers. It's a very complex system, but particularly when you're going through a report that calls for a radical transformation. It makes it clear that to get it right, we have to do it right, so we're taking the time to make sure we do it right.

We're encouraged to see that so many of the 108 recommendations in the report have been supported by, I believe, both opposition parties. We look forward, of course, to working in this—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Grant Crack: Minister, it's great to hear that the report from the commission contains some far-reaching recommendations to improve social assistance right here in Ontario. But at the same time, it has been a couple of months since the commission delivered their report, and I certainly understand that it can take some time to digest these recommendations because of the fundamental change that's going to be required.

The social assistance system is too important for too many Ontarians for us to miss this opportunity for change. So I would like to ask the minister: Will this government be implementing any of the recommendations in the report?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Absolutely. We'll be looking at the report very seriously. It is, as I mentioned, a very transformational document. I know, by working collaboratively with all members of the House, we will move forward to make the kinds of improvements that the report called for.

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There are some 108 recommendations from the commissioners, and they highlight that it's more than just about tweaking a system. It's really about some pretty radical transformational change. The recommendations about creating a new and better system that is mindful of the cost of inequity and poverty are important. It's something that many of us have dedicated our lives to, and it's something that we can't close our eyes to and need to be moving forward with. I look forward to working with everyone in this House to make sure that happens.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is for the Premier. In light of your energy minister's revelation today that there are more documents to come regarding the cover-up or—sorry—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member will withdraw.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I withdraw, Mr. Speaker.

In light of the Liberal Party's decision and your government's decision in the last election to relocate the power plants—that was the first scandal. The second scandal is that for months and months and months in this place and outside of this place, you refused an order of this House. You played funny with the law—in fact, you broke the law of the Legislative Assembly Act—and you did not produce the documents. Now we find there are more documents to come.

In light of all of that, will you keep your promise of your Valentine's Day letter to Andrea Horwath and Tim Hudak when you said that you would set up a select committee, no strings attached? We need to get to the bottom of this, and clearly, you rascals can't be counted on to get to the bottom of it—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member will withdraw that comment.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I'm running out of vocabulary here, Mr. Speaker. Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. While in some circumstances I try to find the humour in everything, in this particular case, because of the situation, I am not going to ask anyone to do anything that they shouldn't be doing in this House. It is a simple withdrawal with no comment. Withdraw, please.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I withdraw, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you, Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: I was quite frankly appalled by that question, particularly the beginning part, the fact that the House leader of the Progressive Conservative Party, someone with years of experience, would stand here in his place, knowing that there has been a *prima facie* ruling by you—which means on the surface nothing has been determined. This matter is before a committee of the Legislature. That he would stand here in his place and pre-judge the outcome of a committee, I find shocking.

The other thing: I think it's always important to put it in context, as I did with the leader of the Progressive Conservative Party; and once again remind everyone of the support of the leader of the Progressive Conservative Party. Here's what they had to say about the gas plants. The member for Halton told this Legislature on June 1, 2010, "The people of Oakville have told you they don't want the proposed gas-fired power plant ... and I agree with them."

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jim Wilson: Back to the Premier: Premier, I honestly think you don't want your first week as the 25th Premier of the province of Ontario to be like the last 10 years of the Dalton McGuinty government, where Premier McGuinty would say one thing and always do something else and break his promises. You have made a promise. You have put it in writing. The need for a select committee couldn't be clearer. You have the agreement of all of the opposition members. You offered it.

Your House leader hasn't exactly given you the correct information. He didn't give us a choice; he gave us an ultimatum: "My way or the highway. You drop your point of privilege, we'll have a select committee." That was not acceptable, that would never be acceptable, and you knew that when you offered that to us.

The fact of the matter is—in your first week of question period, 25th Premier of the province of Ontario, keep your promise.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Be seated, please.

Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: There are absolutely no secrets here, Mr. Speaker. I have said over and over again—in fact, I said it in my remarks yesterday in the speech that I gave on the point of privilege—that we sat down with the opposition and we identified two potential paths forward. One is, they could support the point of privilege that we

anticipated correctly would be raised by the member from Cambridge, a point which we found to be mean-spirited and vindictive; or we could talk about moving ahead with a select committee.

Mr. Speaker, the opposition yesterday made their choice. If they regret that choice, I'm very sorry, but they made their choice. As I have said on a number of occasions this morning in the House and will continue to say, the government, although we did not agree with that motion, will co-operate fully with the committee as it begins its work.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, to the Premier: I am appalled, but not surprised, that more documents have come forward. But even more importantly, Premier, your predecessor's office was asked for documents under freedom of information—Project Vapour documents—some of which had been provided.

The Premier's office said that no such documents existed, even though it was clear from previous documents that had been released that they did exist. Are you engaged in a search in your office for relevant documents?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, a request was made by the committee for documents. Those individuals who were required to respond to that request have worked in good faith and, as we heard this morning, have continued to work in good faith to comply with the committee's request.

The issue of the production of documents to the committee is now before the justice committee through a motion that was passed yesterday. I think all of us are intending to co-operate fully with that committee and, of course, are looking forward to their recommendations. They will be looking at the whole question of document production. And as I say, Mr. Speaker, I think all of us should let that committee become established administratively and continue its work.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, back to the Premier: You have said that this is an ongoing process. You've said that you will be open. I'm asking you a question. The OPA obviously went through their documents. Is your office looking for the documents that your predecessor said no longer existed? What is the state of that search for the documents that you know this province deserves?

Hon. John Milloy: Again, the committee made a request, and all those who have been charged with that request have worked in good faith to produce the documents. On two occasions now those individuals have come forward, and they have apologized and stated that they have found additional documents. A committee has been charged with this issue and will be looking into it further.

But again, I think it is so important to put this into context. You know, I can't help but think how the

member for Toronto-Danforth has changed his tune when on October 7, 2010, he said, "I don't agree with the Oakville power plant. I don't think it is necessary." Mr. Speaker, what we're talking about is a decision that was supported by every single party of this House. They fought the last election on it, and it's time they come—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: My question is for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. Minister, in my riding of Scarborough-Rouge River, many students in grade 12 are now considering their post-secondary education options. They have been thinking about what they will do once they graduate from high school and whether they can afford attending college or university this coming September.

We, the members of this Legislature, all know the value of post-secondary education, but students and parents in my riding are concerned about the potential costs associated with higher education.

Minister, what is our government doing to keep the costs of education manageable for our low- and middle-income families across the province?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I want to thank my Scarborough colleague for the question. As indicated in our recent throne speech earlier this week, I'm pleased to confirm that this government will be continuing our 30% Off Ontario Tuition grant. To date, over 200,000 low- and middle-income families have benefitted from these savings. Students can still reapply if they can do so by the end of this month.

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I also want to take this opportunity to say that I and this government stand with the chorus of middle- and lower-income students and their families in condemning the PC plan to eliminate this 30% off tuition grant. We're not going to do that, Mr. Speaker. That plan would cut \$400 million out of the pockets of lower- and middle-income Ontario students and their families. We're not going to go there. This government will continue to do all we can to ensure that we have an accessible, affordable and quality post-secondary education system available to Ontario students.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: It is good to hear that our government remains committed to the grant. The 30% off tuition grant is important to lower- and middle-income families. Also important is access to the financial assistance needed.

I've read reports in the newspaper this past week about proposals to gear assistance levels to the marks of students. That has sparked considerable concern among low- and middle-income students in my riding. Can the minister advise on whether the government is contemplating such a policy?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I have indeed seen those reports over the past week or so, Mr. Speaker. Let me begin by assuring students across Ontario that I join them in condemning the notion to base financial assistance on marks. That just doesn't make sense. Many of those students who are struggling with marks may well be those students who we ought to be trying to help the most. Think about who may be in that lower quartile. You think about students who are struggling with socio-economic issues, students who may have part-time jobs, students who may be elite athletes who are trying to balance their training with their work at school. It may be aboriginal students who are adjusting to coming from Far North communities to southern universities. Those are the kind of students we ought to be trying to help the most.

The PC plan to dump those students on the street is economically irresponsible, and, Mr. Speaker, it's social reprehensible. I'm pleased to confirm that we, as a government, will not take that direction.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Steve Clark: My question is to the Premier. I can't believe what has happened today in question period. Premier, you talk a good game about accountability and transparency, but it's our actions that define us, so let's look at yours. The minister who brought us Ornge and eHealth still has her position. The person who stymied every single attempt we've made to make some progress on finding out the truth about the gas plant is still your House leader. Like your predecessor, you're breaking promises and you haven't even broken in your new chair.

Premier, shuffling the boss down a few seats doesn't make for change. It doesn't make for renewal, especially after what happened today, especially what happened when the Minister of Energy stands up. Please, stand in your place and make good on your promise. Strike the select committee today.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Thank you for the question. This all started with the so-called cancellation of two gas plants, Mississauga and Oakville. I want us to think back to October 2011, Mr. Speaker. In October 2011, when the Leader of the Opposition was asked the question of would he scrap the Mississauga plant, he said, "That's right. Done, done, done."

So I ask the Leader of the Opposition, did you calculate what the cost of moving that gas plant would cost? Did you have a budget for it? When you made the commitment to cancel it, did you have a price to cancel it? Answer that question. Or Oakville—did you have a price to cancel it? And I say the same to the NDP. No, you did not. You agreed with us; we agreed with you. Cancel the plant. Did you have a cost to cancel it? The answer is no.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Steve Clark: Premier, the Oscars are on Sunday, and I think the movie that best describes question period is Groundhog Day. Every morning we wake up and it's

the same old routine at question period. We keep asking the questions Ontarians want answers for; you keep refusing. Really, Premier, you deserve an Oscar for your portrayal of Dalton McGuinty.

Your House leader—we had a meeting on Tuesday. Your House leader looked me in the face. I asked him when he was going to table this appointment for a select committee. He said to me, "When are you going to drop your contempt motion?" I looked him in the face and said, "I am not going to stand in the way of a member's right to bring a point of privilege in front of this House." He looked at me and said, "This motion's off the table." What do you have to say about that?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Minister of Energy.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, they want answers. They think that the opposition doesn't have to be accountable. They have to be accountable for what they promised in the 2011 election. They promised to cancel and move the Mississauga gas plant. I want to know, what is the price tag they put on their promise or was it just a promise that they weren't prepared to fulfil?

There should be accountability on the part of the opposition. They're not accountable. They make idle promises and then they blame somebody else for doing what they promised to do.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): New question. The member from Timmins–James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Premier—
Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. I did mention this yesterday, and I'll mention it again today. We're now starting to move towards the individualizing of question period, and I'm disappointed. It's absolutely frustrating—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): —and I don't need anyone to make any editorial comment when I'm trying to get a point across.

It's not right for us to do that. I've already got a list of people. That should be enough.

The member from Timmins–James Bay.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Premier. We're in shock on this side, and I think the public is in shock about how this government has dealt with this. Repeatedly, we have been told that all the documents have been given. Ministers of the crown and members of this government have stood in this House over and over again, and again yesterday during the debate in regard to the motion that struck the committee to deal with this, that no more documents exist. We now found out yet again there are more documents. My colleague Mr. Tabuns asked you a question, and it's a question that you have to answer.

The Premier's office has not released any of the documents relating to the gas plants that were asked for. We're asking you this simple question: When do you plan on doing the search for those documents, and when can we expect that you're actually going to release the documents that are contained in your office?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think these questions have been answered in the sense that the issue is now before a committee. We are going to comply with all of the requests from the committee. We are going to do everything that we can, and I've said, Mr. Speaker, that I am going to appear before the committee.

The information should all have come out at the same time. That obviously would have been preferable. All of us would have wished that the information and all the documents could have come out at the same time. The fact is, it's an ongoing process. The search for those documents goes on, and as has been requested by the Legislature and the committee, those documents are being searched.

I would have preferred that they all came out at the same time. We're going to comply with the request from the committee. I have said that I will appear before the committee when asked and provide the information that I'm asked for.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: So, am I to draw from the answer to this question that in fact there are more documents, because the way that you're answering, you're saying you are conducting a search and there may be other documents.

This is a serious matter. The government has stood in this House repeatedly, has gone before the media and said that all the documents that exist on this have been released. We now find out letters from the OPA and documents that are contained within their computer systems were not released. We have to believe that somebody knew within the OPA and somebody knew within the government.

So I ask you again: When are we going to get all of the documents related to this and, specifically, those documents related to your office?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I can only repeat what I said earlier, that the committee made a request for documents. Those people who were—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, come to order; last time.

Hon. John Milloy: —in a responsive situation worked in good faith to produce those documents.

Mr. Speaker, what has been discussed in this place last fall and discussed in this place this morning is that further documents have come to light. The minister, as he reported to the House, found out about it last night and stood in his place before question period to inform the House of all that he knew, with further details coming from the OPA this afternoon.

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I would also remind the member that a committee of this Legislature is in the process of being established. It will be seized with this matter, and they will have a chance to explore this issue and talk to those people who were asked to respond to the original request by the committee.

SENIORS

Mr. Joe Dickson: My question is for the minister responsible for seniors. Congratulations, Minister, on your very well-deserved appointment.

Minister, it is a well-reported fact that our province has an aging population. According to the statistics I have seen in Ontario, Ontario is home to approximately 1.8 million people over the age of 65. That's 13.9% of the entire population of our province, and it's growing. Experts are predicting that by the year 2036, the number of people over the age of 65 in Ontario will double to 4.2 million.

Minister, I'm not the only one who's aware of these statistics, as they are quoted to me by my constituents of Ajax-Pickering. They want to make sure that the government is taking the necessary steps to make sure—and to protect and look after our senior population. They want to make sure that their grandparents and their parents enjoy the senior years—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Question.

Mr. Joe Dickson: —make sure that that happens.

My question to you is, Mr. Minister, what is our government doing to protect seniors in the province of Ontario?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister responsible for seniors.

Hon. Mario Sergio: Thank you very much, Speaker. It's good to see you back in the chair.

Let me say thank you. I'm very grateful to the outstanding member from Ajax-Pickering for his question. The member has been a very untiring supporter of seniors' issues, and I'm really glad to answer his question. Let me say that I'm also delighted to speak on behalf of and represent all the seniors of Ontario.

Interjection: Including Monte.

Hon. Mario Sergio: Yes.

It's no secret that our seniors' community is growing older, and as they are growing older, they are living longer. I think that is good; I think that is very nice. I think this is what we like to see. But I think what we would like to see even more is to see that our community grows older, lives longer and lives healthier.

I think some of the programs that the member has mentioned in his question address exactly that. We see the statistics. The statistics that the member has mentioned speak exactly to that, Speaker, because our community—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Joe Dickson: I thank you, Mr. Minister, for the response. My constituents will be happy to know that our government is addressing our province's aging population head-on, and I will be proud to tell them our government has gone to great lengths to make it easier for our seniors to access all programs being offered.

I know that Ontario has already been busy implementing programs and services for many years to help older adults. Ontario's Action Plan for Seniors will build upon a solid foundation of what has already been done, such as the recently launched Healthy Homes Renovation Tax Credit, worth up to \$1,500 annually; the first-ever Retirement Homes Act, 2010; our Aging at Home Strategy, 2007; and the end of mandatory retirement by age 65, in 2006. Ontario's strategy to combat elder abuse, the first—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you, Minister?

Hon. Mario Sergio: The member is quite right. We have quite a number of plans and programs that seniors can avail themselves of and that are being provided to them. They can assess them.

Some of the plans that the member has mentioned are there, and they were specifically put in place to make our seniors—to give them an opportunity, because after all, our seniors want a choice, and they want a chance to access what they need and when they need it. The action plan is one of those plans that does exactly that.

We have the service for seniors. He has mentioned elder abuse. As a matter of fact, it's a first in Ontario. We have provided the Ontario retirement act, and it's another first for Ontario and Canada as well.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is to the Premier. Premier, to paraphrase Shakespeare, something is rotten in the province of Ontario. Given what we heard from your Minister of Energy today, how can you stand in your place and refuse to appoint a select committee now, for the province of Ontario, to deal with the gas plant cancellation and relocation issue?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: I'm very pleased to outline to members yet again the nature of the discussions that took place with House leaders over the past number of days, where we fully acknowledged the concern that exists around the gas plants.

We anticipated, obviously correctly, that the member from Cambridge had the opportunity to raise his point of privilege, something I totally respect, but we also knew that it would come to a vote.

What we said to the members opposite was that there were two ways to proceed. One way was for them to support a potential point of privilege; the other was to look at a mechanism such as a select committee. They made their choice. We saw it yesterday; it was not our choice.

But once again, we look forward to working very closely with the committee. We will co-operate fully with

it, and many of the issues that have been discussed this morning will, I anticipate, come before—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: You know, whether it's the McGuinty government or the McWynnetty government, nothing seems to change here in the province of Ontario. The way she dismisses the questions by punting them over to the House leader is not acceptable.

This is a vitally important issue. New information came to the floor of this Legislature today. You made a commitment to the Leader of the Opposition and to the leader of the third party by letter, and you released that to the public through the press. Once you do that, that is your commitment to the people of Ontario as well.

You made a commitment to establish a select committee to get to the bottom of this issue. Nothing less is acceptable. I tell you to stand in your place today and do what you have promised: Establish a select committee so this can stop. We've got to get to the bottom of this.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Order.

Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: The judges at the Academy Awards are going to have a tough time, with the theatrics we've seen across the way.

Mr. Speaker, we spoke about a select committee; it was rejected by the opposition. But what has come forward is a committee that arose from the member from Cambridge's point of privilege. I agree with the honourable member that this is an important matter, and I know that the committee will be looking at all aspects of the document production. As I've said earlier today, and I repeat again, the government will co-operate fully with the committee as it undertakes its very important work.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Cambridge on a point of order.

Mr. Rob Leone: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I seek unanimous consent of this House that the Minister of Energy, on behalf of the government, attest in writing to the Speaker and this House that all documents related to the gas plants in Oakville and Mississauga, without reservation, equivocation or mental reservation of any kind, have indeed been tabled, and that the government shall immediately table, with the Clerk of this House, said documents in the following formats—one set each of printed paper copies for the caucus of the official opposition, the caucus of the third party, the Auditor General of Ontario, and the Queen's Park press gallery—and that electronic copies, scanned in a searchable format, also be provided to the aforementioned groups.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is there unanimous consent?

I heard a no.

There are no deferred votes.

This House stands recessed until 1 p.m.—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): —I'm already in the middle of this; sorry—until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1149 to 1300.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

DRIVE CLEAN

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: We in Perth–Wellington have what is lacking from this government, and it's called good common sense. We know a wasteful, ineffective and aggravating government program when we see it. That's exactly what we have in the Drive Clean program.

Constituents are contacting me with their problems in trying to get their clean, late-model vehicles to pass the government's revised emissions test. They also want to know why we have to get the test done but our neighbouring counties do not. It doesn't make any sense.

Dealers have their own horror stories. Instead of measuring what matters—actual emissions from the tail-pipe—the government demands they use a new, complicated computerized test. It's prone to failure, even for perfectly good cars. To get some cars to pass the new test, technicians are advised to drive the car for 30 kilometres at speeds of up to 65 miles per hour, all without stopping. Try that in small-town Ontario.

The Auditor General specifically warned the Liberals not to implement the new tests until the technical problems were resolved. Typically, the government ignored the auditor's advice. They also ignored his findings on value for money. Instead, they're just making the problems worse while picking even more from drivers' pockets.

I've met with dealerships and repair shops across Perth–Wellington. I have heard first-hand the Drive Clean program is failing. It is clear to us that this government is also failing the test—the test of common sense.

I want to encourage my constituents to make their voices heard by signing the petition available at scrapdriveclean.ca.

DEEPA MEHTA

Mr. Rosario Marchese: It's my pleasure to recognize the achievements of one of my constituents, Deepa Mehta. Ms. Mehta is an internationally renowned filmmaker whose films include her Elements Trilogy—Fire, Earth and Water, the last of which was the first film by a non-French Canadian to be nominated for Academy Award for best foreign language film.

Her latest film is *Midnight's Children*, based on the Booker prize-winning novel by Salman Rushdie, and it is nominated for the best motion picture at the 2013 Canadian Screen Awards, which takes place on March 3. She's also nominated for best director. For these achievements, Ms. Mehta was awarded the Order of Ontario last month.

In a riding that includes so many talented artists, she is an exemplar of the highest standards of excellence. I wish to thank her for all she has contributed to my riding and the world of film, and I will be cheering for her on March 3.

GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY SERVICES FAIR

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: I'm pleased to be able to rise in the House today and share with you and the rest of the communities about our community fair. It's a government community fair that the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore and I have been putting on for eight years. It's an opportunity for the people to come and have an understanding of what government provides in terms of services. It's an opportunity for what's occurring in the community, whether it's sometimes for profit or sometimes not-for-profit organizations that are supportive of the issues that are in the community.

I'll give you a good example. It might be LAMP, it might be MPAC, it could be Parks Ontario, and what it is about is, 3,000 people each year come and have an opportunity to learn what's happening in their government, also to find out what's going on in their community, and then, of course, to network, and that's really what it's all about.

It's going to happen this Saturday, February 23, at Cloverdale Mall, on the East Mall in Etobicoke, from 11 until 3:30. It really is a chance for folks to be able to talk to someone one-on-one about an issue that impacts and affects them, without having sometimes to pick up that phone and get the "hold for" or "choose one of." Instead, they get an actual person that they can speak with. It helps them and it helps us, obviously, because then they get to know and understand what is available for them in terms of the government.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to be able to share this with you. As I said, Laurel Broten and I have been doing this for eight years—extraordinarily successful.

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I rise today to question why our new Premier and Minister of Agriculture overlooked food. Last week at the swearing-in ceremony when Premier Wynne separated the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, she took on the role of Minister of Agriculture part-time and created a Minister of Rural Affairs, but in the whole ceremony there was no mention of food.

When she took the oath, Premier Wynne clearly stated, "as Premier and president of the council and Minister of Agriculture of the province of Ontario"—there was no mention of food. The people of Ontario want to know: Did our new Minister of Agriculture forget about the food portion of the ministry or did she think it wasn't important enough to mention?

Premier, there should be someone in cabinet to voice the importance of food and to consider the impact of new regulations and legislation on our food manufacturers and retailers.

According to a recent economic impact study for the Alliance of Ontario Food Processors, Ontario's food manufacturing industry is a \$39-billion sector with over 120,000 direct jobs and close to \$7 billion in exports.

We believe in the importance of Ontario's food system, from our farmers to our food processors, our food terminal, retailers and farmers' markets. It's hard to believe this government's claim to support local food if they couldn't even bother to officially name someone to be responsible for it. I hope that the Premier will explain whether she deliberately eliminated food or whether she simply just forgot about it.

EXPERIMENTAL LAKES AREA

Ms. Sarah Campbell: Since being opened in 1968, the Experimental Lakes Area in my riding has been home to groundbreaking research that has not only increased our scientific understanding of freshwater ecosystems, but has helped protect our drinking water, enhanced fish and aquatic species conservation, enhanced policy for all levels of government and has been relied upon by industry to enhance their projects.

Even though this facility has a modest annual budget of less than \$2 million, it is set to be closed by the federal government at the end of March, bringing this invaluable research to an end.

Despite assurances by Ontario's Minister of the Environment this past spring that this government was opposed to the closure, other than co-authoring a letter, the government has failed to act. This lack of action is appalling, given that the province has the power to prevent the closure by enforcing a bilateral agreement that was signed with the federal government, which requires all 58 lakes to be fully rehabilitated if the site is to be closed.

At a projected cost of more than \$50 million, it is much more cost-effective to keep the site open and to allow the invaluable research of the Experimental Lakes Area to continue.

Speaker, this is a very worthwhile facility that needs to remain open, and this provincial government has the power and the influence to see that it happens. Keeping it open will not cost the Ontario government or taxpayers one cent.

Today, I am once again calling on the provincial government to take meaningful action to ensure that this facility remains open.

FAMILY DAY WALKATHON

Mr. Bob Delaney: The Mississauga Muslim community and other western Mississauga faith communities spent Family Day at Mississauga City Centre, raising

\$70,000 for the Credit Valley Hospital Foundation in the third annual Family Day Walkathon.

Each year, the Mississauga Muslim community and their partners have exceeded their fundraising target for the Credit Valley Hospital Foundation. In three years, the Family Day Walkathon has raised a total of \$195,000 for our local hospital.

Our good friend, and a 2012 Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal awardee, Abdul Qayyum Mufti of the Islamic Circle of North America, organized the first Family Day Walkathon. A.Q. Mufti's work on this and many other community events has brought our growing Muslim community into the Mississauga mainstream.

Mufti said of his efforts to bring together the best of Canadian and Islamic culture, values, cultures and traditions, "We are Canadians, no matter what religion we belong to, no matter what culture we practise and no matter what language we speak at home. When we come to a good cause, we should work together shoulder to shoulder. The concept we are trying to spread is neighbours helping neighbours."

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Ontario says thank you—shukria—to A.Q. Mufti and to our Muslim- and other faith-community neighbours. Well done. Thank you very much.

SCOUTS AND GUIDES MOVEMENT

Mr. Steve Clark: It's a privilege to rise during Scout/Guide Week to celebrate the thousands of young people and their adult leaders across Ontario. Scout/Guide Week in Canada begins the Sunday before February 22, the birthday of Scouts founder Robert Baden-Powell and his wife, Olave Baden-Powell. From February 17th to 24th this year, Scouts Canada and Girl Guides of Canada hold special events to highlight the tremendous role the movement plays as a positive and powerful force in the lives of our youth.

I'm proud that Scouts and Girl Guides remain a way of life in my riding of Leeds-Grenville. Every week you'll find thriving troops of Sparks and Beavers, Brownies and Cubs, Pathfinders and Venturers meeting in communities like Merrickville, Spencerville, Mallorytown, Brockville and Prescott. These young people are excited to follow a path explored by their parents and grandparents before them. Along the way, they learn values like leadership, respect, courage and co-operation that make them more resilient individuals and better citizens. For that, we owe a tremendous gratitude to those dedicated leaders who give freely of their time to keep this tradition alive.

Nowhere is that commitment more evident than in Biddy Adams and Marjorie Boyle, both of whom are in their eighties and continue to volunteer every week as leaders of the 2nd Brockville Sparks. I ask this House to join me in offering a sincere thank-you to leaders like Biddy and Marjorie and to wish everyone in the Scouts and Guides movement our best wishes for a bright future.

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

Mr. Vic Dhillon: I rise today to reiterate our government's commitment to keeping auto insurance affordable and available for nine million Ontarians. Auto insurance fraud is not a victimless crime, as it affects all of us. It leads to higher premiums and it makes the roads more dangerous.

We're implementing the recommendations of the Auto Insurance Anti-Fraud Task Force. This will help Ontario drivers protect against fraud and reduce insurance rates across Ontario. The initial results from the implementation of the first round of recommendations from the task force indicate changes are working to stabilize rates. New regulatory amendments being introduced will help prevent auto insurance fraud and protect consumers by requiring insurers to provide claimants with all reasons for denying a claim, giving claimants the right to receive bimonthly detailed statements of benefits paid out on their behalf, increasing the role of claimants in fraud prevention, making providers subject to sanctions for overcharging insurers for goods and services, and banning them from asking consumers to sign blank claim forms.

The Liberal government continues to make changes to Ontario's auto insurance system to help address fraud and reduce the overutilization of accident benefits and excessive assessment costs. Last year, we had implemented a package of auto insurance reforms designed to reduce costs in the auto insurance system and ensure more accident benefit dollars go to treating people injured in auto accidents.

I urge all Ontarians to help the regulators identify fraudulent activities. Together we can make our insurance system more affordable, available and fair.

TOWN OF AURORA

Mr. Frank Klees: I rise today to pay tribute to my hometown of Aurora. On February 3, Aurora marked its 150th anniversary with the mayor's sesquicentennial levee, hosted by Mayor Geoffrey Dawe. The event launched what will be a year-long celebration of the town's proud heritage. In recognition of Aurora's exemplary commitment to honour and to preserve its heritage and culture, the town was awarded the Prince of Wales Prize for Municipal Heritage Leadership and the Lieutenant Governor's Ontario Heritage Award for Community Leadership and heritage conservation and promotion.

The childhood home of Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson, Aurora was also home to many notable athletes, such as former Olympic champion skier Brian Stemmle, equestrian Olympians Jim Elder and Jim Day, and numerous NHL players including Harry "Hap" Holmes, Tie Domi and Mike Kitchen. To its more than 55,000 residents, there is no better place to live than the town of Aurora.

To commemorate the sesquicentennial year, a flag was unveiled at the mayor's levee in Town Park. I would like

to congratulate Victoria Harris, a grade 4 student from Northern Lights Public School who won the flag-design contest. I ask all members to join me in officially designating the town of Aurora as the centre of the universe during its sesquicentennial year. Thank you, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I have to tell the member that he'd get an argument out of Walter Gretzky, who says Brantford is the centre of the universe all the time. But maybe we can trade.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 98(c), a change has been made to the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business such that Mr. Wilson assumes ballot item number 4, Mr. Klees assumes ballot item number 16 and Mr. Walker assumes ballot item number 63.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

HEALTH PROFESSION CORPORATIONS STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI A TRAIT AUX SOCIÉTÉS PROFESSIONNELLES DE LA SANTÉ

Mr. O'Toole moved first reading of the following bill: Bill 4, An Act respecting health profession corporations / Projet de loi 4, Loi relative aux sociétés professionnelles de la santé.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. John O'Toole: The bill would give and allow all health care profession corporations to have the same opportunities that are available to other physicians and dentists today. It will allow family members to partner in small business to allow them non-voting shares and would allow for cross-profession relationships. Mr. Speaker, this is fairness for the Regulated Health Professions Act professionals.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Hon. Michael Coteau: Before I begin, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the Premier for placing her trust in me. It's an honour to serve in her cabinet, and I'm excited about the opportunity to work with Ontario newcomers. I look forward to continuing the good work

of my predecessor to ensure immigration works for our economy and newcomers and all Ontarians.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to inform my colleagues that February is Black History Month in Ontario and in Canada. As a black Ontarian, as a Canadian, I can say with pride that this month is a celebration of my history.

It's a celebration of Canada's history. Canada's racial, cultural and religious diversity is what makes this nation such a great place. It makes us greater than the sum of our parts. Since before Confederation, the black community has helped weave the social, cultural and economic tapestry that makes up this great society. That is particularly true here in Ontario, where 60% of black Canadians have chosen to live.

But there is something else which we like to take pride in, Mr. Speaker. If black history in the United States is largely the story of people casting off the shackles of slavery, then black history in Canada is the story of a country that has become a beacon of hope.

"I'm going straight to Canada," sang one man who was fleeing Tennessee via the Underground Railroad. "I'm going straight to Canada, where coloured men are free." That was in 1860, and the song is called the Song of the Free.

Since those days, the story of black people in Canada and Ontario has been one of courage, determination, dignity and accomplishment. It's a story that everyone in this Legislature can be proud of. It's our story.

Over the last two years, we lost several men whose lives were a testament to those virtues. Among them, they include Lincoln Alexander, the former Ontario Lieutenant Governor and Canada's first black MP; Charlie Roach, who was a human rights activist and lawyer; Leonard Braithwaite, civil rights activist and Ontario's first black MPP, elected to this chamber 50 years ago in 1963; and Dudley Laws, civil rights activist and founder of the Black Action Defence Committee.

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Finally, we lost Herb Carnegie, whom many regard as the best black hockey player who never played in the NHL. He never played simply because he was black, but he cleared the path for many talented black Canadian players who have played ever since.

Mr. Speaker, Ontario's black community today includes artists, scientists, playwrights, journalists, musicians, businesspeople and dedicated public servants. It is a legacy all Ontarians benefit from, and it makes us stronger as a province. I urge my colleagues to use this month of February to reflect on our community, the black community in Ontario, and to look at their contributions that continue to make our province proud.

I'd like to ask this House for unanimous consent to observe a moment of silence after the responses to recall the contributions made by these giants and many others of the black Ontario community whom we lost this year.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We'll deal with that unanimous consent after ministers' statements. Statements from ministries? No others?

Time for response.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I am honoured to rise in this House and speak on behalf of the people of Wellington-Halton Hills and on behalf of the Ontario PC caucus. I am privileged to have this chance to recognize Black History Month.

I want to begin by congratulating the new Minister of Citizenship and Immigration and extend my personal best wishes to him as he undertakes his new responsibilities. I look forward to working with him.

We all know that Ontario's black community has a long and proud history in our province. In fact, black history is Ontario history. The two are inextricably linked. The Ontario Black History Society reminds us that black Canadians fought valiantly alongside English, French and aboriginal Canadians in the War of 1812, including the Battle of Queenston Heights and the Battle of Lundy's Lane.

Thousands of escaped slaves fleeing the oppression and scourge of slavery in the southern United States arrived in Ontario via the Underground Railroad in the 19th century. They established early settlements in such towns as Windsor, Chatham, Guelph and St. Catharines. They became Canadians and raised their families in freedom. They and their descendants went on to become farmers, teachers, business owners, doctors and lawyers. Their contributions were fundamental in helping to build the Ontario we know and celebrate today.

Last November, Canada mourned the loss of Lincoln Alexander, one of our greatest Canadians, who made a meaningful and lasting contribution to both our province and our country. He was a man who broke barriers and led the way for the next generation of leaders who follow in his footsteps, inspired by his example. It was appropriate and fitting that the throne speech presented to this House two days ago began with a tribute to the Honourable Lincoln Alexander.

I will always remember an encounter I had with Lincoln Alexander in August 2008, when he visited Wellington county to help unveil an historical heritage plaque in Glen Allan, which I will revisit again in a minute. "Good afternoon, Your Honour," I said as I greeted him. "They said there would be some big shots here," he said in reply. I smiled, protesting that I really didn't see myself as a big shot. He said, "All you MPPs think you're big shots." We both laughed, remembering that he, too, had been a parliamentarian, and so was by his own definition a big shot himself.

Lincoln Alexander grew up in an Ontario that was far less tolerant and inclusive than the province we know today, but as Sandra Martin wrote in the *Globe and Mail* shortly after his death, he was a man who had the capacity "to turn rejections and despicable slurs into a personal challenge to excel."

Lincoln Alexander was first elected to the House of Commons as a Progressive Conservative in 1968, becoming Canada's first black member of Parliament. He held his Hamilton riding through five consecutive elections, and in 1979 was appointed Minister of Labour, earning the distinction of becoming Canada's first black

cabinet minister. After he retired from partisan politics in 1980, he served as chair of the Ontario Workers' Compensation Board, and later broke yet more new ground, becoming Canada's first black Lieutenant Governor when he was appointed LG in Ontario in 1985.

That was the position he held when I was first elected to the Legislative Assembly in 1990. When he came into this chamber for a throne speech or other special occasion, he had a regal bearing and a manner that ironically seemed to be down-to-earth at the same time.

Lincoln Alexander inspired thousands of young Canadians with his life story and example of overcoming discrimination, pursuing excellence and working for a better Canada. He inspired a new generation of leaders who continue to help shape our country and our province today.

As some members of the House may remember, in 2008 I brought forward a bill recognizing August 1 as Emancipation Day in Ontario. This was to commemorate the day in 1834 when slavery was abolished in Canada and throughout the British Empire. That bill also holds the distinction of being the first bill ever introduced in this House to be jointly sponsored by members from different parties. I had approached Maria Van Bommel, and she graciously agreed to work with me on it.

We brought this bill forward together after I had attended the ceremony I referred to earlier in the community of Glen Allan in Wellington county in 2008 to unveil that plaque commemorating the Queen's Bush Settlement. As I was leaving the ceremony that day, a man whom I'd never met before approached me. He told me that he thought there should be a bill in the Legislature recognizing August 1 of every year as Emancipation Day in Ontario. As I was driving home, I kept thinking about what he had said. Shortly afterwards, as a result of that conversation, I asked legislative counsel to draft the legislation that was eventually passed into law by this House, with support from all three parties.

While working on the bill, I had the opportunity to get to know Dr. Rosemary Sadlier, the president of the Ontario Black History Society. Rosemary has spent countless hours volunteering with the society because she firmly believes, and I agree, in the importance of educating Ontarians about black history and the significant achievements of the black community in building our communities all across the province. This is a chapter of our history that should make us all very proud.

Black History Month is an opportunity to pay tribute to the legacy of countless individuals, including the late Lincoln Alexander, and the lasting contributions that they have made to our province and to our country. I hope that everyone in this House and indeed all Ontarians will take the opportunity to learn more about this history and the important role that the black community has had in building our great province.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Michael Prue: This is a day we stand up once a year to talk about black history in Canada, in Toronto, in Ontario; and we do it with a great sense of pride as Canadians, as Ontarians.

I listened to my colleague from Wellington-Halton Hills as he carefully and thoughtfully talked about Lincoln Alexander.

I note the other names here. I had the opportunity over my life to know all of them and to know them very well—not only Linc, who was a fixture in and around this place, but also Charlie Roach, who was a lawyer of some renown. Although he never became a Canadian citizen, because he wouldn't swear an oath to the Queen, he was fiercely, fiercely loyal to this country. I worked with him on many immigration issues over the years.

Leonard Braithwaite: I knew him too when he was a parliamentarian, and I actually knew members of his family quite well.

Dudley Laws, whom we often sparred with in immigration when I worked there—he was a gentleman. He was able to put forward his ideals in the most strong and most forceful way and actually was able to produce, I think, much better race relations in Toronto than existed before he started.

Last, but not least: Herb Carnegie. I have worked alongside his daughter Bernice and fundraised over many years while I was here in the Legislature.

We are going to miss all of them, and we need to give them a long moment of silence.

But back to the issue: Every year, we have this month. We set it aside for the contributions of people who have come, of course, from many lands. We talk about black history in Canada and in Ontario, but we have to remember that although almost all of the people can trace their ancestry from Africa, they did not come directly from Africa, most of them. The people who have come to this country from many lands have come from the Caribbean; they have come from Africa itself; they have come from the United States; they have come via Europe. I've met many people who lived in England for a time and who found that it was just not as hospitable a country as they might expect here.

I also have the privilege of owning a summer home in Amherstburg, Ontario, which, for those who may not know the site, is about 25 or 30 kilometres due south of Windsor. When I say that to people, they think, "How can you still be in Canada?" But they look at the geography, and you are. Amherstburg has the most wonderful black history museum. It has black history churches. The entire town was the terminus for the Underground Railroad. It was the place where black people fleeing from the United States could first find freedom, from crossing that Detroit River, from crossing onto what is today called Bob-Lo Island and then into Amherstburg itself. It has been beautifully preserved, and I think of that today as well.

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I think about the waves of immigration from many lands who have come here and joined us and have contributed so much to the people of this country. They have contributed in every field and endeavour with enormous enthusiasm. So we celebrate, and we remember. Let me put it better: We remember in February, but it behooves

all of us to celebrate throughout the year. There cannot be and should not be just one month to celebrate black history. There must be all the months of the year, because the citizens who have come and joined us from many lands have a history that we embrace.

It's that celebration—and I don't want to end on a bad note but I feel very aggrieved, Mr. Speaker. I raised this issue with you last year in March, when the Greek community was here to celebrate their heritage. Members of the opposition are often denied an opportunity to celebrate with Ontarians whom we should be celebrating with and whom we want to be part of. Tonight, the Premier will be addressing the Black History Month reception. It will be hosted by our new minister, whom I wish all the best. However, it will be held in room 247, which, for those watching on television, is the government caucus room, to which members of the opposition are not ever invited, cannot attend. That means all of us on this side cannot celebrate with you. I checked; none of us were invited. I checked: Can I go to room 247 as the Speaker ruled last March? No, I cannot. Therefore you have a celebration which all of us would like to be part of, but we cannot.

I mean no umbrage to this minister or to people in black history, but I think we need to come to some better kind of conclusion. If the government is going to use that caucus room in the future, then all people, all members of this Legislature, should be invited. And I say that I wish everyone—everyone from Ms. Sadlier and everyone who was part of this—all of the best. I celebrate with them even though it's going to be in spirit only. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Citizenship and Immigration is seeking unanimous consent to observe a moment's silence in respect and tribute to the notable deceased members of the black community. Do we agree? Agreed. Please rise.

The House observed a moment's silence.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Pray be seated. It is now time for petitions.

PETITIONS

LYME DISEASE

Mr. John O'Toole: It's a pleasure to be here this afternoon and to present once again the first petition of the day. This is from a constituent of mine who I know has worked on this issue, and I want to read it on his behalf. It's the Lyme disease petition:

"Whereas the tick-borne illness known as chronic Lyme disease, which mimics many catastrophic illnesses such as multiple sclerosis, Crohn's, Alzheimer's, arthritic diabetes, depression, chronic fatigue and fibromyalgia, is increasingly endemic in Canada, but scientifically validated diagnostic tests and treatment choices are currently not available in Ontario, forcing patients to seek

these" treatments and/or diagnoses "in the USA and Europe;

"Whereas the Canadian Medical Association informed the public, governments and the medical profession in the May 30, 2000, edition of their professional journal that Lyme disease is endemic throughout Canada, particularly in southern Ontario;

"Whereas the Ontario public health system and the Ontario Health Insurance Plan currently do not fund those specific tests that accurately serve the process of establishing a clinical diagnosis, but only recognize testing procedures known in the medical literature to provide false negatives 45% to 95% of the time;"

Whereas these undersigned persons "petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to request the Minister of Health to direct the Ontario public health system and OHIP to include all currently available and scientifically verified tests for acute and chronic Lyme disease, to do everything necessary to create public awareness of Lyme disease in Ontario, and to have internationally developed diagnostic and successful treatment protocols available to" all patients and their families and physicians in the province of Ontario.

I'm pleased to sign and endorse this on behalf of my constituent, whose name I would like to put on the record: Brian Barraball.

OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN

Ms. Sarah Campbell: I am pleased to present the following petition:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the province of Ontario is the only province in Canada that does not allow the provincial Ombudsman, who is an officer of the Legislature, to provide trusted, independent investigations of complaints against hospitals, long-term-care homes, school boards, children's aid societies, police, retirement homes and universities;

"Whereas the people wronged by these institutions are left feeling helpless and most have nowhere else to turn for help to address their issues;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To grant the Ombudsman of Ontario the power to investigate hospitals, long-term-care homes, school boards, children's aid societies, police, retirement homes and universities."

I support this and I will affix my signature.

LYME DISEASE

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further petitions? The member for Haliburton–Brock–Kawartha Lakes.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Close enough. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the tick-borne illness known as chronic Lyme disease, which mimics many catastrophic illnesses such as multiple sclerosis, Crohn’s, Alzheimer’s, arthritic diabetes, depression, chronic fatigue and fibromyalgia, is increasingly endemic in Canada, but scientifically validated diagnostic tests and treatment choices are currently not available in Ontario, forcing patients to seek these in the USA and Europe;

“Whereas the Canadian Medical Association informed the public, governments and the medical profession in the May 30, 2000, edition of their professional journal that Lyme disease is endemic throughout Canada;

“Whereas the Ontario public health system and the Ontario Health Insurance Plan currently do not fund those specific tests that accurately serve the process for establishing a clinical diagnosis, but only recognize testing procedures known in the medical literature to provide false negatives 45% to 95% of the time;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to request the Minister of Health to direct the Ontario public health system and OHIP to include all currently available and scientifically verified tests for acute and chronic Lyme diagnosis, to do everything necessary to create public awareness of Lyme disease in Ontario, and to have internationally developed diagnostic and successful treatment protocols available to patients and physicians.”

Brought to me by Margaret Anthony from Victoria West District Women’s Institute. I’ll sign my name to that and hand it to page Justin.

PROVINCIAL PARKS

Ms. Sarah Campbell: I have another petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, which reads as follows:

“Whereas the Ministry of Natural Resources has announced the end of overnight camping in 10 provincial parks in northern Ontario...; and

“Whereas the decision will result in job losses for northern Ontarians and negatively impact tourism and northern Ontario’s way of life; and

“Whereas local stakeholders and municipalities have not been consulted on these closures and have been denied the opportunity to make these parks more sustainable;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To immediately suspend plans to cancel overnight camping at the 10 provincial parks named above; and

“To consult with local municipalities, stakeholders and regional economic development organizations regarding the long-term viability of preserving northern Ontario’s provincial parks.”

I support this and give this to page Jessica to deliver.

HOSPITAL PARKING FEES

Mr. John O’Toole: I’m pleased to present a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario which reads as follows:

“Whereas the United Senior Citizens of Ontario has expressed its concerns over the high costs of parking at” local “hospitals in Ontario on behalf of its more than 300,000 members; and

“Whereas thousands of Ontario seniors find it difficult to live on their fixed income and cannot afford these extra hospital parking fees added to their daily living costs; and

“Whereas the Canadian Medical Association Journal has said in an editorial that parking fees” at hospitals “are a barrier to health care and add additional stress to patients who have enough to deal with” in aging already;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That Ontario’s members of provincial Parliament and the Dalton McGuinty”—now Kathleen Wynne—“government take action to abolish parking fees for all seniors when visiting hospitals” in our community.

I’m pleased to sign and support this, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the seniors in Ontario, of which I’m one.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further petitions? Further petitions?

There being none, orders of the day.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, seeing that a previous order of the House has cancelled private members’ time, I move adjournment of the House.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The government House leader has moved adjournment of the House. Agreed? Agreed.

This House stands adjourned until 10:30 a.m. Monday.
The House adjourned at 1341.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneur: Hon. / L'hon. David C. Onley, O.Ont.

Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Dave Levac

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Tonia Grannum, Trevor Day, Anne Stokes

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South-Weston / York-Sud-Weston	
Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP)	London-Fanshawe	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington-Halton Hills	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia-Lambton	
Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Scarborough-Rouge River	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand-Norfolk	
Bartolucci, Rick (LIB)	Sudbury	
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Best, Margaret R. (LIB)	Scarborough-Guildwood	
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins-James Bay / Timmins-Baie James	House Leader, Recognized Party / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Minister of the Environment / Ministre de l'Environnement Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Broten, Hon. / L'hon. Laurel C. (LIB)	Etobicoke-Lakeshore	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Campbell, Sarah (NDP)	Kenora-Rainy River	
Cansfield, Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham-Unionville	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport Minister Responsible for the 2015 Pan and Parapan American Games / Ministre responsable des Jeux panaméricains et parapanaméricains de 2015
Chiarelli, Hon. / L'hon. Bob (LIB)	Ottawa West-Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest-Nepean	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Chudleigh, Ted (PC)		
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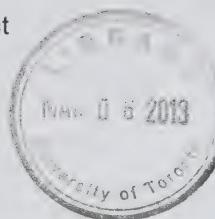
Nº 4

ISSN 1180-2987

Legislative Assembly of Ontario

Second Session, 40th Parliament

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)



Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

Deuxième session, 40^e législature

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Monday 25 February 2013

Lundi 25 février 2013

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
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Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Service du Journal des débats et d'interprétation
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 25 February 2013

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 25 février 2013

The House met at 1030.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mrs. Jane McKenna: I would like to welcome the parents of Burlington page Vanessa Gomez, who are joining us today in the public gallery: mother, Jasmine Gomez, and father, David Gomez. Welcome to Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Introduction of guests? The member from Kitchener-Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. Today, I would like to welcome one of the new legislative pages as well. Mr. Joshua Vito is a student at St. Nicholas school in my riding, Kitchener-Waterloo. Joshua, thank you for your interest in serving the public.

I would also like to welcome Joshua's mother, Nina; Joshua's father, Dino; and his sister Sophia. They are all joining us in the public gallery. To Joshua and his family, welcome to Queen's Park.

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: I would like to introduce Mr. Giordano, who is the father of page Alexander Giordano. Welcome to the Legislature.

Also, Cardinal Slipyj school will be doing a tour today and will join us later in the Legislature so they can have an opportunity to listen to question period.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'm happy to introduce to the Legislature today the mayor of Brooke-Alvinston, Don McGugan, his wife, Anne, and also Councillor Frank Nemcek. Don and Anne McGugan also recently received the Queen's Diamond Jubilee honours.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'd like to introduce Dave Baxter from the London and District Construction Association. It's the first time he's here at Queen's Park, so welcome him.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Please join me in welcoming Cathy Jonker. She's a proud parent of page A.J. and is going to join us here and make sure A.J. does it all right today.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'd like to introduce my sister-in-law, Yvonne McDonell, who is in the gallery here. Her husband is the mayor of North Glengarry, and she's a big supporter of his and mine.

Mr. Todd Smith: I'd like to welcome Ashley Baker to the Speaker's gallery. She's from Madoc, and she's in the law clerk program at Sir Sandford Fleming in Peterborough. She's doing her placement at the Queen's Park

office and our Belleville office as well. Welcome to Queen's Park today, Ashley.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): On behalf of the member from Ajax-Pickering, we'd like to welcome the mother of page Jessica Kostuch, Christine Kostuch. She's in the gallery this morning. Welcome.

ORAL QUESTIONS

POWER PLANTS

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is to the Premier.

Last Thursday, Ontarians learned that the billion-dollar gas plant scandal went even deeper than originally thought. We learned that the scandal was even given code names to hide documents. To date, Mr. Speaker, we've learned that the Liberals have used Project Apple, Project Vapour, Project Banana and Project Fruit Salad to describe the \$1.3-billion scandal.

Premier, can you guarantee that there are no more code names being used?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'm just going to assert that at the root of this question is a genuine desire to get all the information on the table, to get it out into the public realm, to make sure that the standing committee has access to all the information that's available and that the public has access to that information.

I have said consistently for weeks now, and certainly since these questions have been coming in the House, that it is our absolute objective to make sure that every piece of information is available, and I will continue to work on that, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: In fact, Mr. Speaker, there is no access to that information. The Premier promised both opposition leaders that she would strike a select committee to investigate the scandal, and she has broken that promise. She also promised that there were no more documents relating to that scandal, and we now know that's not true.

In the words of one National Post editorial writer, Premier, your decision to cancel these gas plants has "utterly blasted Liberal credibility in Ontario."

Premier, here is your chance to regain some of that credibility and honour your promise. Will you strike a select committee into the \$1.3-billion Liberal gas plant scandal?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I think it is common knowledge that the member opposite is part of a

party that agreed that those gas plants should be sited in other places and those should be cancelled.

I think it would be very interesting to know what the plan that the member opposite had for the cancellation of the gas plants and the moving of those gas plants—it would be very interesting to know what the costing was that the member opposite's party did vis-à-vis that issue.

We have been very clear that every piece of information that is available—we are working to make sure that that is available to the public and to the standing committee. I've asked the Auditor General to look at both issues. I have said I will appear before a committee. The standing committees are back on, Mr. Speaker. I have said that I will appear there, and I know that the member opposite and their party will ask the questions that need to be asked at the committee.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Mr. Speaker, the Premier says that she wants to get to the bottom of the gas plant scandal, but everything that she does suggests the opposite. She has refused to strike a select committee, despite her written word. She has put up the House leader to stonewall the opposition with respect to every question that has been asked. She has refused to release documents between the Premier's office and the OPA. She even refuses to tell the Legislature today if there are any more code names.

Today, in light of Thursday's developments, Premier, will you do the right thing and strike a select committee today so that we can get to the bottom of this gas plant scandal—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Be seated, please. Thank you.

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think it is really important to just sort out what's happening here, Mr. Speaker. The party opposite is asking, this morning, to strike a select committee, which was one of the options that was on the table. At the same time, they were saying that they wanted to have a standing committee, Mr. Speaker. Now I understand that the member for Nipissing actually asked this morning—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Very edgy, but I won't ask.

Premier.

1040

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you, Speaker.

I understand, this morning, that the member for Nipissing actually asked for another inquiry. My understanding was that the Conservatives, the official opposition, actually didn't agree with the notion of an expensive \$25-million inquiry, but apparently the member for Nipissing has asked for that.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think the question has to be asked: What is it that the opposition is looking for? What we're

saying is: Let's get the information out. Let's have the all-party committee meet. Let's make sure that the questions are asked that they want asked.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Victor Fedeli: My question is for the Premier. Premier, you have said you want to "get to the bottom" of the gas plant scandal. Yet last week, your party voted against the justice committee looking into the handling of the documents. That will expose, for instance, who redacted documents, why some documents were not turned over and who directed that to happen.

Then, Premier, you denied this Legislature the select committee you promised in writing, with no strings attached. That will get to expose the true cost of the cancellations. So Premier, why are you so dead set against us getting to the facts behind these two separate issues?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, let's start at the beginning here. We acknowledge the concern that existed in the opposition over the cancelling of the gas plants, and we sat down and said there are two choices. We will support an all-party committee over a vindictive, mean-spirited motion against a former member of the Legislature. We said to them that it's their choice, and I will stand right here and say we will support one; we will not support the other, and they made their choice.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the member stands up, obviously not having talked to his colleagues, having just gone out and called for a judicial inquiry. Maybe he should talk to his colleagues, because this is what the member from Cambridge had to say: "The cost of a public inquiry is excessive; we don't believe that that's necessary. We're paid as individuals to represent our constituents and to hold"—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Stop the clock for a moment, please. I am doing my best to listen attentively to all of the answers and the questions, and I find myself getting to that point where I can't quite hear it when the members are actually within very close earshot of me. And the second thing I want to make a mention of is, when somebody is asking a question and I have people on the same side making heckling noises—and on the answers coming out, people making heckling noises—I'd prefer to have quiet, as I think most people would.

Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Again for the Premier: On Thursday we received our third document dump since the Speaker ordered the release of all gas plant-related documents almost half a year ago. We learned some of your other secret code words to go along with the ominously sounding Project Vapour. As my colleague said, we found the secret Project Apple, Project Banana and Project Fruit Salad files. Speaker, they sound healthy until you realize they cost the taxpayers \$1.3 billion for not one megawatt of power.

Premier, will you strike the committee you promised so we can see the rest of the files buried under secret code names?

Hon. John Milloy: The honourable member seemed to forget in his question the opposition of his party toward the establishment of this gas plant. In fact, Mr. Speaker, just to remind him, here is the text. Let me quote the text—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Simcoe—Grey, come to order.

Hon. John Milloy: —of the Mississauga South PC candidate's robocall in September 2011: "Hi there. This is Geoff Janoscik, your Mississauga South Ontario PC candidate. I'm calling about the McGuinty-Sousa power plant that the Liberal government decided to build in your backyard. I'm against this power plant, and as your MPP, I will fight to stop the power plant from being built.... Our team has been out knocking on doors every single evening for several months, talking about the power plant and making sure that we defeat the Liberals in this riding and put an end to their bad decisions. On October 6, choose change"—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: To the Premier: On September 25 you stood in this House and said that "all of the documents that have been released are the documents that were available." Yet 2011 documents, released three weeks after you said that, include "Confidential Advice to the Cabinet"—a cabinet you served in. The subject line was Project Vapour, the secret code name for the Oakville gas plant cancellation.

Premier, you knew of this secret file over a year ago and you knew it wasn't in the documents that were released. Why would we ever believe a word from you again?

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, we've heard different things from the opposition today. The first thing that we've heard is that the issue of a gas plant that they didn't want has taken priority over education, health care and the economy; and the second is their calls for transparency.

The fact of the matter is, I just indicated that their own candidate, their own leader, their members opposed this gas plant. Obviously, they did detailed policy analysis and costing. So in the interests of transparency, I'm wondering when the Progressive Conservatives will be tabling their policy analysis and will be furnishing the committee with their costing, and calling their experts forward to talk about their decision to cancel this gas plant, one that was echoed in robocalls throughout the riding of Mississauga South and which their leader stood beside during the most recent election.

Mr. Speaker, all of us look forward to those documents and those witnesses coming forward in the coming days.

POWER PLANTS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. Will the Premier agree to move the gas plant can-

cellation issue out of the Legislature by sending it to an open, transparent and affordable public inquiry process?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We've been clear that we believe that all the information that is being asked for should be made available. That is why we've asked the Auditor General to look at both the Oakville and the Mississauga issues. That is why I have agreed to come before the committee and that is why the standing committee, an all-party committee, is going to be looking at the issue of the gas plants.

It is not our intention to set up a very expensive public inquiry process. I do not believe that that is necessary because we have other mechanisms in order to get the information into the public realm.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Mechanisms that have thus far failed, I may remind the Premier.

Unfortunately, more than a year later, we're still looking for the answers. Last year, New Democrats requested all of the emails from the Premier's office about Project Vapour, one of the many code names, of course, that's been used to discuss the cancellations. We were told that no such documents existed, which was shocking since we actually had emails in our hands from the Premier's office that had already been released by the Ministry of Energy and the OPA.

There's a new Premier in town. Can she shed light for us?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I have said, I am going to do everything in my power, working with the Minister of Energy, working with the House leader, making sure that we access all the information that is available.

It would have been my wish that all the information could have been available at one time. The Ontario Power Authority had a press conference last week. They talked about the process whereby they accessed information, and it has been ongoing. We will do everything we can to make sure that every piece of information—it is in our interest, in the interest of the public and in the interest of the opposition that this information is available. We are going to do everything we can to make sure that information is out in the public.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, something's just not adding up. At their press conference on Thursday, officials at the OPA, the Ontario Power Authority, made it very clear that they had informed the government last November that they were still looking for documents. Government ministers in the meanwhile had been insisting as recently as last week that no more documents needed to be released, that they were all released already; everything had been released. That's what government ministers were saying.

Can the Premier explain the disconnect here?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know the House leader will want to comment on subsequent questions about this, but here's the issue: At every point when I stood in this Legislature, when my colleagues stood in this Legisla-

lature, we were talking about the information we had. When we were told that all of the documents had been made available and that all of the information was available, that is what we reported. That was as we understood it at that moment—and that is the case: that every single one of us said what we believed at the moment, what we had been told.

1050

I agree with the leader of the third party. It would have been much better if all the information could have been available at one time. That would have been my preference. That would have been our preference. That was not the reality, Mr. Speaker.

We will continue to work to make sure that every piece of information, wherever it is, is available to the all-party committee that's going to be looking at this issue.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The leader of the third party.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, what part of "We're still looking for documents" don't they understand?

POWER PLANTS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The next question is to the Premier.

Here's what people see. The government, one day, swears that they've disclosed everything, but the next day more disclosures come. The Premier's office denies the existence of emails and documents, including the ones that we already have in our hands. The Premier says an inquiry is not needed. Given their track record so far, Speaker, does she really think that the status quo is going to work?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: The simple fact of the matter is, we have a committee of the Legislature which is seized with this issue. They will be examining a number of issues. Obviously, we saw the press conference from the OPA on Thursday.

I think the most important thing, Mr. Speaker, in the interests of transparency, is to remind everyone that it wasn't simply the Progressive Conservatives who were opposed to this gas plant.

Let me quote for the NDP here, from the *Torstar News Service*, September 16, 2011: "Etobicoke-Lakeshore NDP candidate Dionne Coley also pledged to fight the plant."

The *National Post*, September 29: "...local NDP candidate, Anju Sikka, soon issued statements concurring with the new Liberal cancellation."

Mr. Speaker, obviously, with the importance the leader is giving this, her party did, I'm assuming, a very detailed policy and costing analysis, and I'm wondering: When is she going to be sharing it with the Legislature and the committee?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, I have to tell you that I'm extremely concerned that the Premier who wants to work with the opposition is dismissing good ideas out of hand. She dismissed the idea of an affordable public inquiry into the gas plant scandals.

People don't want vague promises of answers on the gas plant issue any more than they want vague commitments on creating jobs or fixing the health care system. Is the Premier ready to take action and actually establish the public inquiry?

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, the leader of the New Democrats asks that we listen and work with the opposition. Well, in fact, we're following the good advice of the member from Cambridge, who said, "The cost of a public inquiry is excessive; we don't believe that that's necessary. We're paid as individuals to represent our constituents and to hold the government. And that's where we expect this, this hearing to take place. And, we're calling on, on the incoming Premier to call a legislative committee immediately."

Again, I find it strange that the leader of the New Democratic Party ignored my question as to when she and her party will be tabling the information about the policy analysis and the detailed costing they did when they stood and promised the cancellation of these plants and fought the election on it.

Mr. Speaker, we have provided tens of thousands of pages of documents. The least we can get from the NDP is a similar costing and policy—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, people want to see action on job creation; action that improves our health care system; action that builds our economy. But they also need to know that they can count on the government to act responsibly on their behalf and not as though public money and public records are the personal property of the governing party and their campaign team.

The government handed hundreds of millions of dollars to private power companies to make a political problem go away for them. Will the Premier agree to move this issue out of the Legislature by sending it to an open, transparent and affordable public inquiry process?

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I'm hoping the member can explain the difference between the New Democratic Party's opposition to the power plants, the PC Party's opposition to the power plants and our opposition to the power plants, because as far as I'm concerned, all three went into the election opposing them. Perhaps she can explain this by making available to the committee the policy analysis that was done by the New Democratic Party, the costing that was done by the New Democratic Party, as well as furnish the committee with witnesses, experts, members of her own caucus who could come forward and talk about the detailed work that went into their call for the cancellation of them, which they fought the election on and which she seems to have forgotten in the questions she has posed here this morning.

SCHOOL EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is to the Premier. Last night I obtained a confidential memo that was leaked to me. It was a memo from the OSSTF; I'm going to have it brought over. Incredibly, OSSTF takes credit for the NDP win in Kitchener-Waterloo, Dalton McGuinty's resignation, Laurel Broten's demotion, the repeal of Bill 115, and changing your party's education policy.

Given that context, Friday's announcement is a stark change in tone and direction by the union leadership.

Interjections.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I wouldn't be too excited if I were you.

What would you suggest led the OSSTF to change their position? Was it the Ontario Progressive Conservatives' policy on getting extracurriculars back into our schools tomorrow, or is it the guarantee after they gave her tens of thousands of dollars to support her campaign?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. I'm trying to get quiet, and while I'm getting quiet, it's not the time to pipe up.

Five-second wrap-up.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: The question is: They gave you tens of thousands of dollars; what did you guarantee in return?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Withdraw.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: During the leadership campaign, I spoke repeatedly about the need to reopen a discussion with our education partners to get back to a respectful dialogue. That's exactly what we've done. Good process has led to what I thought was a good-news announcement that we would be able to look forward to the majority of students in our secondary schools returning to extracurricular activities.

I think it's unfortunate that the member for Nepean-Carleton sees that as a bad-news story. I would have thought she would be happy for the young people in the high schools in her riding being able to look forward to soccer clubs, robotic clubs, student council and orchestras. I would have thought that would be a good-news announcement for the member for Nepean-Carleton—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That's not going to get you my attention any better.

Minister?

Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: That was interesting. I wouldn't be popping the champagne or patting myself on the back if I were an Ontario Liberal at the moment, because actually—if I may, Speaker—Ken Coran said today,

"There's a genesis, a change, a metamorphosis. We're going to go back to the way business was done."

What does that mean? What does that cost? We already know Ken Coran also told us that 20% of his teachers aren't going to go back and deliver extracurricular activities. We know that ETFO hasn't joined the table to say that those extracurriculars are back. We have no guarantee from this government that extracurriculars will stay in our schools if there is another labour disruption. That's why the only plan that works—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: —is the Ontario Progressive Conservative plan that will restore extracurriculars—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: —that will make sure union leaders stop bullying their students and bullying their teachers, and they can't fine and sanction their teachers.

I ask this government—this Premier—one more time: You benefited from tens of thousands of dollars in your campaign. What did you give them?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Premier?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock.

For both sides, I was trying to be attentive. As I'm speaking, I'm hoping everyone is listening—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm hoping everyone is listening.

I was listening intently, and I do believe I'm hearing a kind of tit-for-tat thing in there that is not parliamentary, and I would ask the member to withdraw.

1100

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Withdrawn, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: The question still remains—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Excuse me. To all members: When I make a ruling, it's my ruling, without any of the editorial. The member will withdraw only.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Withdrawn, Speaker. Do I still have time on the clock?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Have a seat. We'll try it again. Withdraw, please.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Withdrawn, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. No, your time is up.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Here's what I know: For decades in this province, teachers and support workers have delivered extracurricular activities voluntarily. I graduated from high school in 1971, and one of the things that got me to school in the morning was the 7:30-in-the-morning basketball or volleyball practice. I know that's what enriches the lives of students, and it's what enriches the lives of teachers and support staff.

I worked as hard as I could when I was appointed leader to make sure that we engaged the leadership of ETFO and OSSTF. We have gotten to the point where

OSSTF is working with its members now, and I have a huge amount of faith that the majority of those extracurricular activities are going to be available. The member for Nepean–Carleton should be celebrating that.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Premier. Experts have consistently estimated the cost of cancelling the gas plants at over a billion dollars, and yet you have used numbers far less.

On Friday, the Premier refused to back up the government numbers that have been used for months. Will the Premier clarify whether she has any faith in the numbers that were used by the former Minister of Energy and former Minister of Finance in this matter?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the Minister of Energy, please.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: All parties in this Legislature supported the relocation of the gas plants. We were fortunate enough to be re-elected, and we relocated the gas plants.

The OPA has conducted an objective, independent assessment as to the cost. The OPA has provided the \$230-million number to this government, and we made that number and the documents public with respect to the costs.

What is important is that, yes, the OPA did attend a media availability last Thursday. The question was: “At any point during these searches—we are talking about all of them, not just this one—did you feel you were under a great deal of political pressure to either produce or not produce records?” The answer from the CEO of OPA was, “No.”

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Premier, the member for Ottawa South stood in the Legislature on October 15, 2012, and with reference to the Oakville gas plant said that on the matter of the cost, it’s \$40 million. Premier, do you stand by that number?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: I can only repeat what I just said: that we promised, as they did, to relocate the gas plants. We were elected. We relocated the gas plants.

We asked the Ontario Power Authority to provide us with the cost of the relocation. They provided us with the \$230 million—the \$40 million for the relocation of Oakville. We stand by that number, unless and until the auditor, whom we have asked to look into this issue, comes in with a different number, or the OPA comes in with a different number.

We have been straightforward, we have been honest, we have been direct, and we did what we promised to do. We did what they promised to do. We relocated the gas plants.

SCHOOL EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Mr. Grant Crack: My question is to the Minister of Education. Many of us in this House know the value of

extracurricular activities in our schools. Not only do they build self-confidence in our students, but they also make our students into great actors—across the floor—musicians and athletes. Extracurricular activities allow our students to gain strong leadership skills, which will allow them to compete in the global economy.

Many of my constituents want to know when extracurricular activities will resume in our schools. I know getting extracurricular activities back in our schools is a top priority and that progress has been made with Ontario’s secondary school teachers. Could the minister please update this House on the progress of extracurricular activities in our schools?

Hon. Liz Sandals: I’d like to thank the member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell for his question and for his advocacy on behalf of students in his riding. You know, he’s got it absolutely right: This is a good-news story, not a reason to get angry. This is a good-news story that collaboration with our teachers is working.

One of Premier Wynne’s first actions as Premier was to reach out to the teachers’ unions and to re-establish a positive relationship. One of my first actions as Minister of Education was to reach out to our unions, to our teachers’ leaders, and restore that relationship, because we know that working together collaboratively is what produces results. I’m very pleased that OSSTF has voted to lift their—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Grant Crack: Merci, monsieur le Président. Ma question est encore pour la ministre de l’Éducation.

Minister, it’s great to hear that extracurricular activities such as acting will be returning to our secondary schools. I’m also pleased to hear of the progress that’s being made through working collaboratively with our teachers and our support staff. But we all know more work needs to be done to get extracurricular activities back in all of our schools, and we need to continue to build on the gains that we’ve made in education over the past nine years.

Can the minister please tell this House about the government’s plan, moving forward, to make our education system one of the best in the world?

Hon. Liz Sandals: I think it’s important, as we think about the return of extracurricular, to understand that extracurricular activities have always been voluntary. Whether it was the third party, the official opposition, or us, for everyone those activities have been voluntary. I have great faith that our teachers will be returning, because part of what makes a great education system is having our teachers engaged in extracurricular.

But we’ve got other things that we can do together with our teachers. One is to fix the process of collective bargaining, which clearly has got some problems in its structure. We’re going to work with our unions, with our school board associations—all four unions, all four school board associations—to fix the process. But we also have some other priorities. We’re going to work

with all of those people on aboriginal education, to support youth at risk.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Rob Leone: My question is for the Premier. We know full well that 28 members of your government caucus stood in their place and told this House that all documents had been tabled, despite the fact that the pages handed over were either incomplete or heavily redacted. Since then, somewhat magically, two separate document dumps revealed over 20,000 additional pages, many still blacked out or heavily redacted.

My question to the Premier is this: Since members from Mississauga—Streetsville, Mississauga East—Cooksburg, York Centre, Ajax—Pickering, Ottawa—Orléans, the Scarboroughs, Sudbury, Thunder Bay—Atikokan and others were more interested in playing politics than presenting facts, will you ensure that these members will not sit on the justice committee, as we cannot be assured that they can be trusted to get to the bottom of this scandal?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the House leader, please, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): First and last time. Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: The member raises the issue of documents. We have a committee of this Legislature which will be looking into the issue of documents.

But again, the calls for transparency from the Progressive Conservative Party lead me back to the 2011 election. I'd like to quote a PC press release, September 24, 2011. Listen to this: "...the only way to guarantee this power plant does not get built is to elect a Tim Hudak Ontario ... government. A Tim Hudak government will cancel this plant."

1110

My question again, Mr. Speaker: Obviously, the Progressive Conservative Party did detailed policy analysis and costing. Will the member guarantee that that will be tabled at the committee and the experts that the PC Party spoke with will also appear in front of the committee?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Rob Leone: This is complete and utter nonsense. You haven't even presented the documents yourself on how and why you put the plants there to begin with. This is your decision. You can't deflect from it. There are no documents that show why you did it, so before you ask for some accountability on our part, let's see some accountability on your part.

If you won't form a select committee and if the government members of the justice committee are more concerned with protecting the government than getting to the bottom of your billion-dollar scandal, how can the people of Ontario be assured that the new government and their obstruction tactics are any different than the old

government? Or do you call it another half-baked project name?

Hon. John Milloy: The honourable member talks about playing politics when his leader has announced that he will vote against a budget that's not even written yet. Give me a break.

But again, let's go to the Twitterverse. On September 24, Geoff Janoscik, Mississauga South PC candidate: "An Ontario PC govt will stop the plant for good." September 25, the same individual: "@timhudak government will cancel this power plant."

Again, it is obvious, with the importance that this party has put into this issue, that they must have done detailed analysis and costing, so will they commit to tabling with the committee that detailed analysis, that costing they did, the experts that they consulted? They were 100% behind the cancellation of that plant. They had robocalls; they had Twitter; they had press releases. Will they come clean in front of the committee once and for all?

HOSPITAL FUNDING

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée.

Last week, during question period, the minister reaffirmed her intention to move services from hospitals to the community, and suggested that hospital cuts would fund programs like home care. We've already seen cuts at hospitals like Windsor, London and Ottawa. Should other communities also expect to see cuts to their local hospitals in the near future?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I welcome the opportunity to talk about the transformation that is under way in our health care system. The status quo is simply not an option, not if we want to pass along universal health care to our kids and to our grandkids. We need to change how we deliver health care in this province, and the action plan that I released a little over a year ago outlines how we have to do that. Part of that is holding our base increases to our hospitals at zero.

We are transforming how we fund hospitals. Every new opportunity we have for investment, we are investing in the home care and the community care sector. It's the change that the system needs in order to support our aging population and to support our growing population. It has had overwhelming support from the health care sector. It is difficult, and I understand that for some people it is difficult, but it is the right change.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: New Democrats have a plan to ensure that home care is available when and where it is needed and within five days, but our five-day-home-care guarantee looks at efficiencies like lowering administrative costs in LHINs and CCACs and capping hospital CEO salaries, not at hospital cuts. Why is the government choosing to cut hospital services rather than looking at administrative savings?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: There are many changes under way in our health care system right now. I acknowledge that for some, doing things differently is a challenge, but we simply must invest more in the home care sector. We're committed to three million more hours of PSW care and 90,000 more personal support workers. There's a lot going on in the health care system, but at the very foundation of it, we must provide the right care at the right place at the right time. All of the changes are doing that. It's better for people because people get better care. It's also better for our health care system because we'll get better value for the money that we spend.

CONDOMINIUM LEGISLATION

Mrs. Laura Albanese: My question is to the Minister of Consumer Services. Minister, the condo community in York South-Weston includes residents who have been living in condos for years and residents who have purchased new units that vary in size and type. Many of these residents have ongoing concerns and have raised questions with me personally about the Condominium Act. They are encouraged to hear that the government is taking concrete action by conducting a comprehensive review of the Condominium Act instead of applying a thin patchwork of changes that will not solve the problems that they are facing. They are especially interested in the innovative public engagement approach that the ministry has been using to identify the issues and build solutions. Could you provide an update to this House on how these condo consultations have progressed so far?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Thank you, Speaker.

Applause.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Thank you.

First, I want to thank the member for York South-Weston for her question. I appreciate her overall interest in the Condominium Act review.

As MPP for Pickering-Scarborough East, I attended one of the consultation meetings. It increased my appreciation of how important it is that we review the Condominium Act. For example, Speaker, half of all new home purchases in Ontario are condos. That's a significant number. To put it in more perspective, almost 1.3 million people in Ontario live in condos. That equals the size of the population of Saskatchewan. This speaks to how important it is for us to look at this act. As minister now, I'm excited to be moving this forward.

I'm pleased to inform the House today that the stage one review is now concluded. On January 22, the Public Policy Forum, which has been leading this engagement process, released findings on stage one.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Laura Albanese: Thank you to the minister for that answer. I also would like to take this opportunity to congratulate her on her new appointment as minister.

This review of the Condominium Act, as the minister pointed out, is really extremely important to the over one million Ontarians who live in condos. I'm glad that we

are taking a comprehensive and thorough approach that leads to long-term solutions to the issues. I support the engagement that the ministry has been having with everyday citizens who make up the condo sector and who are actively involved in developing those solutions.

Can the minister please share: What are the next steps in this public engagement process to review the condo act?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: We've now moved to stage two of the condo review process. We are gathering the public comment on the findings report. It has identified five top issues so far, related to governance, dispute resolution, financial management, consumer protection and the qualifications of condo managers. We're aiming to collect all formal public comments by March 11 of this year. In this stage, we'll have condo experts review the findings report and the public comments we received, and we'll prepare options and recommendations.

Finally, in stage three, we'll reconvene the residents' panel to review the experts' report and turn it into an action plan. In the fall of this year, the public will then have another chance to review and validate the action plan before it is presented to government.

POWER PLANTS

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: My question is to the Premier. Throughout your leadership bid to take over this scandal-plagued Liberal Party, you made grand commitments about restoring government transparency. You came through southwestern Ontario, and that was one of your planks. In fact, on February 14, you publicly announced that you were prepared to call a select committee to get to the bottom of the gas plant scandal.

Premier, we know you were proud to embrace the McGuinty legacy; we just didn't think you would embrace his schemes to bury the biggest scandal in Ontario's history this soon into your premiership.

Premier, will you follow through with your commitment to Ontarians and restore transparency in government and immediately strike the select committee you promised, with no strings attached?

1120

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know the House leader will want to speak to the supplementary, but I just want to be clear once again that I have absolutely followed through on the commitments that I made during my leadership bid. I said clearly that I was going to work with the opposition to make sure that all of the documentation was available, and that we had a forum in which those questions could be asked and those documents could be made available. I have asked the Auditor General to look at both the issues. I have said I would appear before committee.

There was a discussion with the opposition, with the House leaders, among the House leaders about which path to follow, whether there would be discussion at the standing committee or whether there would be a select committee. The opposition made a choice.

We have said very clearly that all the information that is asked for at the standing committee will be made available.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Back to the Premier: I find it rather ironic that your government has chosen to use fruit to circumvent FOI requests, especially when last week it was proven that food was an absolute afterthought for you, especially when you had to have a secret swearing-in ceremony to officially become the Minister of Agriculture and Food. The secrecy continues. You just can't be trusted.

You were a key player in the campaign team and cabinet inner circle that decided to stick Ontarians with a \$1.3-billion bill to save two Liberal seats. You promoted the \$1.3-billion man to Minister of Finance in your overloaded cabinet that we can't afford.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Question?

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Now you're continuing your mentor's history of secrecy and broken promises. Again, you just can't be trusted.

Reverse this—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'm going to take this opportunity—because it was embedded in this question, the issue of my being Minister of Agriculture and Food. I want to just say I am so honoured to be able to play that role.

Mr. Speaker, it's true: There was an administrative glitch in the swearing-in—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Huron-Bruce. The member from Oxford, come to order.

The member from Huron-Bruce, listen, because you asked the question.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: There was an administrative glitch. When I was sworn in, I was sworn in as the Minister of Agriculture. Subsequently, we corrected that administrative glitch and I was sworn in as Minister of Agriculture and Food.

I know how important the agri-food business is to this province. It's a \$34-billion industry; it's the second-biggest industry in the province. It is a priority of this government to make sure that it has the support that it needs.

HOSPITAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. For far too long, Windsor residents have been stuck looking at the Grace Hospital site, which is really nothing more than an eyesore, a pile of rubble at the heart of their community.

Last week, the member from Windsor West stood in her place—in fact, she stood in front of the Grace site itself to announce that she was fairly certain cabinet will approve funding for the cleanup.

Cabinet met since that photo op. My question is a pretty simple one: Will the Premier please tell the people of Windsor when they can expect the help they have been promised again and again?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: The answer to the question is yes.

Interjection: She said "when."

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Oh, when? Very soon; as soon as it can be done.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The question I was going to ask in my return is, we've heard these kinds of promises over and over again from the government. The people of Windsor have waited over and over again for the reality to come to fruition.

The question is a simple one. Is it going to happen during the by-election? Is that when that money's going to flow?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, obviously polite, to-the-point, friendly answers aren't working.

We're not, in every answer we use, hyphenating Windsor and London. From the party that always accuses this party of politicizing things, you got a very non-political answer—

Interjections.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I think that the people in Windsor and my colleague from Windsor West have worked very hard to find money in a very difficult time for this hospital.

These are the kinds of things, Mr. Speaker—because I have huge respect for the leader of the third party and I think we share a lot in common on the health care agenda—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock.

I'm actually having difficulty because I have to start raising my voice, even when the microphones are here, in order to ask for some calm. So I'm asking that that stop; bring it down. Particularly for those that are asking the question and those that are answering—I'm still hearing people, while someone's asking a question, starting to heckle, and when somebody is answering, to heckle. That only encourages the rest of it. So, please, focus on the answer and the question.

Minister, wrap up.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: This is something that's very important. This is something that I think both of our parties agree is a critical piece. I'm hoping it's something that we can work on. We'll have a budget shortly that will outline these kinds of things.

Mr. Speaker, in concluding, I just want to say this: At ROMA and OGRA I've been inviting members of the opposition to sit in with their municipal leaders and to do that in a non-partisan way. I hope the leader of the third party—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

GREAT LAKES WATER QUALITY

Ms. Helena Jaczek: My question is for the Minister of the Environment. Here in Ontario, we have the privilege of being co-stewards of nearly 20% of the earth's fresh surface water: the Great Lakes. Conserving our Great Lakes water supplies and protecting our water quality is essential to ensuring the health of our families, our communities and our economy. But recently Ontarians have been hearing about algae in Lake Erie and declining lake levels.

Speaker, through you, I'm wondering if the minister could provide details to the House on what the government has done to protect the Great Lakes.

Hon. James J. Bradley: An excellent question—members of the House would know that over the years we've made progress in cleaning up some of the polluted areas around the Great Lakes, reducing the inputs of toxic substances and restoring natural habitats. We continue to be a strong partner—people will agree with that—in protecting and restoring the Great Lakes through our work with federal, municipal and US partners.

Thanks to these efforts, water quality has improved in some areas and fisheries are recovering. There's been progress in reducing toxic substances such as PCBs and mercury in the Great Lakes, and the cleanup of historical contaminated sites has continued.

The Great Lakes Guardian Community Fund, which offers modest grants to grassroots groups that are undertaking improvement projects in their corner of the lakes, is being helpful. Projects range from scout troops cleaning a river valley, to a fish club planting trees along a stream bank, to a local conservation foundation tackling invasive species.

We have made progress; we need to make more.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Helena Jaczek: As you recognize, Minister, the Great Lakes are vitally important to Ontario families. They provide us with drinking water, quality of life and prosperity. As one of the most ecologically diverse regions in North America, we need to keep the Great Lakes healthy now and for our children, our grandchildren and future generations. Ontarians want measurable reductions of pollutants in the Great Lakes.

Speaker, through you, I'm wondering if the minister could provide details to the House on how our government will continue to protect, conserve and restore the Great Lakes.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Indeed, the Great Lakes are facing threats, including population growth, climate change, invasive species, blue-green algae blooms, pharmaceuticals and new chemicals of concern. Clearly our job is not over; more needs to be done. New challenges are overwhelming old solutions. That's why we need new initiatives to help the Great Lakes.

Later today, as I've indicated to my opposition critics, I will reintroduce the Great Lakes Protection Act, which is designed to restore and protect the Great Lakes so they are drinkable, swimmable and fishable. The proposed act

would provide new tools to restore and protect priority areas. Protecting and restoring the Great Lakes will enhance the quality of life for Ontarians and leave a strong environmental legacy for future generations to enjoy.

I look forward to working with my colleagues on all sides of the House to move this bill forward.

1130

MEMBERS' PRIVILEGES

Mr. Todd Smith: My question this morning is for the Premier. On Friday, I received a letter from your government House leader. In it, he states that he learned on September 27—and, in his duties as House leader, immediately informed members of the government caucus—of the possible existence of more documents related to the power plant cancellations in Oakville and Mississauga.

So we're clear, were you informed—as the government House leader suggests that he informed the government caucus—that there could be more documents back on or about September 27? Were you informed about that?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I'm troubled on two fronts. I'm troubled, first, because this is an active point of privilege, which is under consideration by you. I'm also troubled because the honourable member is misrepresenting the submission that I brought—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I know my job. The member will withdraw.

Hon. John Milloy: Withdraw, Mr. Speaker.

We've been through the facts of this case. Myself and the former Minister of Energy, Mr. Bentley, were made aware that there was a potential for more documents—merely the potential for those documents. When that was confirmed, steps were taken to inform the House. I stood in this place, as did the Minister of Energy, to correct our record at the first available opportunity when it was confirmed. That interim period, as I said, is now the topic of a point of privilege that you are looking at.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Todd Smith: The government House leader can't have it both ways. Either you informed the members of your caucus on September 27, as you stated in your letter, or you didn't. If you did, then several members of your government caucus, including a number of cabinet ministers, stood up in the House on October 1—and after that—stating that all of the documents were released. If you didn't, then your letter of last week was incorrect.

What I want to know, government House leader, is: Which John Milloy should we believe?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please.

I thank the members for their patience. The member has raised a situation that I believe—because I did not

know the identity of this letter, which could have been a response inside of the act of privilege that's happening right now—should not have been asked. Because I did not catch it immediately—and I had no knowledge of what letter you were referring to—I'll have to let it go. I'm going to ask the minister to respond. However, I also will ask you to withdraw the last part of your question, as it was unparliamentary.

Mr. Todd Smith: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I will try to be parliamentary and simply say that the honourable member has selectively read the letter. We have been through the course of events in here a number of times in the Legislature, and in writing, in a submission that I made to you on the point of privilege, to point out that myself and the Minister of Energy were told that there was the potential for more documents. We stood and corrected our record once we knew there were more documents, which was several weeks later. We did not involve other members of the caucus, Mr. Speaker. That has been outlined in the letter that I submitted to you.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Stop the clock.

With the interaction that just took place, I'm going to inform the House that those kinds of questions will be assumed to be about an active point of privilege, and I will deny the question or the answer.

New question.

ONTARIO NORTHLAND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Mr. John Vanthof: My question is to the Premier. Since taking office, the Premier suggested that she is ready to take the north seriously. Northerners are still reeling from the government's decision to divest Ontario Northland and cancel our passenger rail service. As we speak, the communications division is on the block, and the refurbishment shops, the bus lines and the freight will follow.

Will the Premier halt the divestment process and give northern stakeholders like the mayors and freight customers a chance to come up with solutions that work in the north and benefit the rest of the province as well?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The Minister of Northern Development and Mines.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I think it's fair to say that probably one of the more difficult decisions made by my predecessor in this was the decision in terms of the divestment of the ONTC. Certainly increasing subsidies and our fiscal challenges made it difficult to maintain a strong business case for it. The work that we've been doing since that time is very, very crucial.

One thing the Premier has made very clear to me is how important an integrated and strategic transportation strategy for northern Ontario is, and the Premier has asked us to follow through on that. Certainly, in terms of

the relationship that we have with our municipal partners, particularly the Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities—we're looking forward to meeting with them this afternoon. I've also tried to signal as strongly as I can that we want to have a process by which we can work more closely in terms of the decisions that are coming out of this.

Again, our priority is economic development in northern Ontario, prosperity in northern Ontario, working through the growth plan to implement those measures as well, and certainly developing a transportation strategy for the north. So we continue to work closely with—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. I stand, you sit.

Supplementary?

Mr. John Vanthof: Once again, to the Premier: During her leadership campaign, the Premier said she would create a transportation plan for the north. Okay, but selling off and closing vital ONTC infrastructure while talking to northerners about creating a transportation plan is like closing the barn door after you let the horse out of the barn. Premier, will you please halt the ONTC divestment process and give northerners a chance to determine their own future?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: If there's one thing that Premier Wynne has made very, very clear, it is that northern Ontario is an incredible priority for this government. We are holding a northern cabinet meeting, Premier, this coming Friday in Sault Ste. Marie. We'll be setting up a northern cabinet committee, whose priorities will be to look at the opportunities that are there. Certainly, I think those opportunities are there. It's a priority for our ministry, the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines, a ministry that is focused on economic development and jobs creation in northern Ontario, and that's something that we're going—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek, come to order.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: —certainly, the Premier has made it very clear how important it is that we get the transportation strategy in northern Ontario right. We recognize how important that is for the economic development needs that are going to be happening, particularly the Ring of Fire and those opportunities. So our commitment is to take that seriously, to work closely with our municipal stakeholders, to work closely with the Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities, and we'll be doing that on a daily basis.

RURAL ONTARIO

Mr. Phil McNeely: This question is to the Minister of Rural Affairs. Minister, as you know, this week councillors and staff from rural municipalities from across Ontario are gathered in Toronto for the Rural Ontario Municipal Association and the Ontario Good Roads Association Combined Conference.

As representatives of their communities, they'll be bringing many issues that they wish to address with our

government. As a consulting engineer for 30 years, I attended the Good Roads for over 25 of them, and I know how important this conference is to the rural and small urban communities.

Mr. Speaker, through you, could the minister please update this House on what his ministry is doing to address concerns and engage with rural Ontario?

Hon. Jeff Leal: Through you, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member from Ottawa—Orléans, a hard-working member who does a great job for the people of Ottawa.

In fact, I was in Ottawa about a week or so ago, and I had the opportunity to meet the Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Stephen Harper. Our daughters were actually playing volleyball together in a tournament in Ottawa, so it was a great opportunity to be with the Prime Minister and chat with him about a number of things.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer.

Hon. Jeff Leal: I want to get to the answer here, Mr. Speaker.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order, please.

Supplementary?

Mr. Phil McNeely: Minister, thank you very much for that response.

Laughter.

Mr. Phil McNeely: Congratulations to you on your new duties. You have always been a champion of rural Ontario, even as an urban member from Peterborough. We look forward to that.

I also know that I've been hearing about the dual ministers for Rural Affairs and Agriculture and Food. Can the minister please be more specific about the distinction between the two ministries?

Hon. Jeff Leal: Mr. Speaker, through you to the member for Ottawa—Orléans: I think this is a wonderful opportunity. Rural Ontario offers so many opportunities, and this government has worked closely with rural Ontario, small towns and villages—an opportunity for infrastructure development and agriculture. So this will give us the opportunity to have a laser-like focus on issues in rural Ontario.

Interjections.

Hon. Jeff Leal: A laser-like focus. So I want to take this opportunity to work with all members in this House to provide that focus for rural Ontario—all kinds of opportunities—and we're seeing that at ROMA—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Laughter is good for your digestion.

As there are no deferred votes, this House stands adjourned until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1143 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Steve Clark: It's a great pleasure for me to introduce some municipal officials from my great riding of Leeds—Grenville. From the township of Front of Yonge:

Mayor Roger Haley. From the township of Leeds and the Thousand Islands: Mayor Frank Kinsella, Deputy Mayor Heidi Conarroe and Councillors Geraldine Dickson and Brigitte Lesage-Tye. Welcome to Queen's Park.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

CASINOS

Mr. Steve Clark: I rise to call on the Premier to keep her promise that Ontarians get a say before a casino comes to their community. She needs to listen, because that's not happening in eastern Ontario.

Kingston council and OLG are pursuing a new casino that would devastate two communities in my riding and go against the will of the vast majority of Kingstonians.

The front page headline in Saturday's Whig-Standard shouted what's in the hearts and minds of Kingston residents: "Poll shows 60% oppose casino." This poll also showed an astounding 78% insist citizens get the final say in a referendum—not OLG, not city council, but the people. I remind the Premier that these people agree with the three members of her cabinet who supported our casino referendum bill.

I would like to thank both the town of Gananoque and the township of Leeds and the Thousand Islands for their support. For 10 years, their communities have had a great partnership with OLG and the 1000 Islands casino. Both sides prospered. I want to thank the two councils for their great growth plan for the future.

Instead, OLG is determined to plunder this casino from two communities who welcomed it with 59% and 62% support in a referendum and take it to a city where 60% don't want it. Speaker, that is wrong, so I join Mayors Demchuk and Kinsella, their councils and their residents and the people of Kingston in calling on the Premier to ensure it doesn't happen. Don't let OLG break your promise, Premier, by forcing a casino on Kingston.

PROTECTION FOR WORKERS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Members' statements? The member from Kenora—Rainy River.

Ms. Cindy Forster: This past weekend, I was on the picket line in Stevensville with my federal NDP MP Malcolm Allen and members of CEP Local 425-G. These 100-plus office and plant workers were notified of a permanent layoff by their employer, Vertis Communications, a printing plant, in mid-January. They were laid off immediately. This US company filed for bankruptcy in the US, and now these workers, many of whom have 30, 35 years of seniority, are being denied severance pay, to the tune of \$2.7 million in total. The office workers have had their pension plans gutted by 50%, and all had promised health care benefits reduced. In some cases, both husband and wife have lost their jobs.

These workers are guarding this plant 24 hours per day because it's their only ace in the hole. The printing

equipment, paper and ink still remain inside the building—a building that was purchased by another US company, Quad Graphics.

Speaker, if US Vertis Communications is not responsible for the workers' severance pay and Quad Graphics is not responsible for the workers' severance pay, who is going to ensure that Ontario workers' rights for severance pay are upheld?

What are the Wynne Liberal government and the Harper Conservative government going to do to ensure that when foreign companies invest in this province and open in this province that workers' rights are protected under provincial and federal employment legislation?

The government is supposed to be there for the people.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank the member from Welland, and I correct my record. I misinformed the House of your riding. I now stand corrected, and I apologize to the member from Welland.

FAMILY DAY WALKATHON

Ms. Dipika Damerla: I rise today to talk about what leadership and the coming together of a community can look like. On Family Day—as many of you will recall, Family Day was very cold—hundreds of Mississaugans came out to take part in a walkathon to raise funds for the local hospital: Credit Valley Hospital.

The walkathon started three years ago, and is organized by the Mississauga Muslim Community. In a short three-year period, they have raised 70% of their stated goal of raising a quarter of a million dollars. This is good money for the Credit Valley Hospital, but as important as this money is, I think what is really even more important is the leadership, sense of community and desire to give back that the Mississauga Muslim Community has demonstrated. For that, I congratulate them and thank them for making Mississauga a better place to live.

None of this would, of course, be possible without the work of hundreds of volunteers, and while it's not possible to name all of them, I would like to mention a few: Abdul Qayyum Mufti, Azrab Khan, Ovais Iqbal, Amaan Khan, M. Zahid, Dr. Bajwa, Dr. Shafiq, Masrur Shaikh, Salman Faruqi, Abdullah Daad, Arshed Yaqub—and the list goes on. Once again, thank you so much, Mississauga; thank you so much, Mississauga Muslim Community.

ONTARIO NORTHLAND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Many northerners, including myself, were very disappointed to hear the recent comments from the Premier and the new northern development minister that they plan to continue, full steam ahead, with their fire sale of the Ontario Northland.

Last fall, I wrote to the Auditor General detailing how this fire sale will achieve no savings, yet the government continues to press forward. I plan to move a motion at committee this week to ask the Auditor General again to

formally investigate the government's sale plans to examine the true financial picture.

Thorough consultations my colleague from Parry Sound—Muskoika and I undertook last summer provided us with many facts. Ontario Northland rail freight is strategically critical infrastructure to economic development in the north and to private job creation in the north, and they must remain publicly owned—something that I wrote to the new minister and to the Premier as well.

One approach is the new deal for Ontario Northland, which proposes a publicly owned rail transportation solution for the vital Ring of Fire mining development. The best way to transport ore, in my opinion, is by rail; an economic analysis study released on Friday supports that position. The ONTC can and should play a vital role in developing this once-in-a-lifetime mineral discovery.

MUSLIM SOCIAL SERVICES OF KITCHENER-WATERLOO

Ms. Catherine Fife: Last week, I was pleased to present the Ontario Trillium Foundation grant award to Muslim Social Services of Kitchener-Waterloo. This not-for-profit organization was founded in 2007 in response to the need for a culturally and spiritually sensitive community agency in Kitchener-Waterloo. Their founder, Idrisa Pandit, has worked hard to foster a just, equitable and peaceful community by bridging the gap in understanding and compassion between faith communities and cultures through the delivery of social services.

The model Muslim Social Services has adopted from its inception was one of co-operation and partnership with other mainstream agencies, faith groups and counselling centres that have well-established social service infrastructure. Their motto has always been to treat anyone approaching Muslim Social Services for its services with dignity, respect and compassion. Their core programming includes community outreach, counselling, refugee settlement and the Safer Families project, which raises awareness about issues of abuse and violence.

This funding, provided through the grant, will provide some physical infrastructure for the work of Muslim Social Services and some needed stability for the community. It is a well-deserved grant which will only strengthen the growing and changing community of Kitchener-Waterloo, a community which is quickly learning that our diversity is our strength.

COURAGE CANADA HOCKEY TOURNAMENT

Mrs. Laura Albanese: Last week, I was thrilled to attend the first Courage Canada national blind hockey tournament, right here in Toronto at the Mattamy Athletic Centre. The tournament saw, on ice, young hockey players from all over the country who are blind or visually impaired. This incredible achievement is the long-time dream of one of my outstanding constituents from York South-Weston, Mark DeMontis.

1310

Some may remember that I recognized Mark in this Legislature back in 2009, after he completed the incredible feat of skating 5,000 kilometres from Toronto to Vancouver to raise awareness and money for blind youth hockey teams. Last fall, Mark skated another 2,000 kilometres from Halifax to Toronto to complete his journey from coast to coast.

Mark was diagnosed with Leber's optic neuropathy at the age of 17. He became legally blind, which ended his dream of playing in the NHL.

In 2008, he founded Courage Canada, a charity that teaches blind youth to skate and play hockey.

Mark's story is one of triumph over adversity. His courage and spirit have raised awareness and funds for blind youth programs while inspiring Canadians of all abilities.

This season, Courage Canada hopes to reach 400 children and youth in 30 communities across Canada. I am extremely proud to congratulate Mark on yet another astonishing accomplishment.

ACADEMY AWARDS

Mrs. Jane McKenna: Last night, Burlington-bred composer Mychael Danna edged out heavyweight rivals like Thomas Newman and John Williams to win the Academy Award for Best Original Score for his work on Ang Lee's *Life of Pi*. The Nelson Secondary School grad's Academy Award will be in good company, joining his recent Golden Globe for Best Original Score.

Mychael was also Oscar-nominated in the Best Original Song category last night, but lost out to Adele's James Bond theme, *Skyfall*.

Burlington enjoyed more Oscar attention when *Brave* won for Best Animated Feature. Steve Pilcher, M.M. Robinson High School grad, was production designer for that acclaimed Disney Pixar movie. Steve's Oscar will also stand alongside a Golden Globe in the same category earned a month earlier.

Although Mychael now calls Toronto home, his mother, Edith, who was in the audience to help celebrate the win, is still a Burlingtonian. The same is true of Steve. While he has lived in California since the late 1990s, his parents Don and Dianne still call Burlington home.

Congratulations to Mychael and Steve. Your outstanding work continues to make all of Burlington proud.

WOMEN'S CURLING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Mr. Phil McNeely: Yesterday, before a crowd of 4,444 people at Kingston's K-Rock Centre, Team Ontario captured the Tournament of Hearts curling title. I'm especially proud of Team Ontario because they are from my hometown of Ottawa.

Skip Rachel Homan's victory was all the more impressive because she bested four-time champion and curling legend Jennifer Jones 9-6 in the Sunday final.

In a close, exciting match, Homan never conceded the lead to the favoured Team Manitoba. The match's decisive moment came in the seventh, when Homan performed an impressive double takeout on her first shot. This sent the heavily pro-Ontario crowd wild, and Manitoba never recovered.

This is the first Hearts title for 23-year-old skip Homan, who has become known in the curling community as a fearsome competitor. I look forward to watching this young Ottawa curling star win future titles, and wish her the best of luck in her qualifying bid for the 2014 Winter Olympics.

On behalf of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, I'd like to extend well-earned congratulations to Emma Miskew, Alison Kreviazuk, Lisa Weagle and team captain Rachel Homan. Wasn't their coach a wonderful coach? Well done, Team Ontario.

ARC INDUSTRIES

Mr. Ted Arnott: On Saturday, January 26, while some MPPs were at Maple Leaf Gardens trying to put a new face on things, I was at a different event, an event that speaks volumes about the strength of our communities in Wellington-Halton Hills. I was in Erin at the official opening of the new ARC Industries East building. ARC stands for Adult Rehabilitation Centre, and is a program of Community Living Guelph Wellington that provides employment training and support for people with an intellectual disability.

As my friend Marvin McDougall, chair of the fund-raising committee, said so eloquently at the opening, ARC Industries is in the "hope" business—hope for the future, including the hope that clients can take their rightful place in the community.

ARC Industries East's fund-raising committee raised \$1 million for the project. It was like a miracle for a small community to do this in a time of economic challenge, and it's interesting to note that they never even asked for a government grant, because they thought that route would most likely lead to nothing but delay. Instead, they leaned on local partnerships and organizations, generous local donors, a local builder and sub-trades. Everyone pulled together to make the vision of a new building a reality in just under two years. In doing so, they provided a template of how a caring community responds to show its compassion.

I couldn't wait to tell this story in this House because I'm so proud of my constituents. Everyone involved deserves our warmest thanks and congratulations.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 98(c), a change has been made to the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business such that Mrs. Albanese assumes ballot item number 2 and Mr. Bartolucci assumes ballot item number 48; Mr. Colle

assumes ballot item number 3 and Mr. McGuinty assumes ballot item number 65.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

COMPREHENSIVE PUBLIC SECTOR COMPENSATION FREEZE ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR LE GEL GLOBAL DE LA RÉMUNÉRATION DANS LE SECTEUR PUBLIC

Mr. Shurman moved first reading of the following bill: Bill 5, An Act to freeze compensation for two years in the public sector / Projet de loi 5, Loi visant à geler la rémunération pendant deux ans dans le secteur public.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Interjections.

Mr. Peter Shurman: I hear the socialists over there hollering, but the fact of the matter is my party's stance is very clear on this. We believe that we're out of control. We believe that the McGuinty-Wynne government has been giving away the store and plans to continue. We believe that the first tenet of a good jobs-and-the-economy policy is the introduction of a two-year mandatory wage freeze in the broader public sector, and we'll argue that on Thursday, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): A reminder is in line. It has been recommended time and time again for members who are introducing either a private member's bill or a government bill that you read from the explanation, to avoid such debate, because debate takes place at a later time—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): —and I know the member will allow me to finish—that we stay focused on what's in the explanatory note, because the debate takes place when the bill is introduced at second reading. Thank you.

GREAT LAKES PROTECTION ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR LA PROTECTION DES GRANDS LACS

Mr. Bradley moved first reading of the following bill: Bill 6, An Act to protect and restore the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin / Projet de loi 6, Loi visant la protection et le rétablissement du bassin des Grands Lacs et du fleuve Saint-Laurent.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Speaker, I will make my statement during ministerial statements.

TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY SKILLS AWARD ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR LE PRIX COMPÉTENCES POUR LE 21^e SIÈCLE

Mr. O'Toole moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 7, An Act to create the Twenty-First Century Skills Award for school pupils / Projet de loi 7, Loi créant le Prix Compétences pour le 21^e siècle pour les élèves.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. John O'Toole: With all due respect to education and our children, this bill is intended to introduce work that would prepare children for the future in a knowledge-based economy, and the following skills with relationship to the work would involve responsibility, organization, ability to work independently, collaboration, initiative, self-regulation and, if the pupil is involved in a French-language institution, ability to communicate orally in French. I'm pleased and I look forward to support of this bill.

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LIQUOR LICENCE AMENDMENT ACT (SERVING LIQUOR IN CERTAIN PLACES), 2013

LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES PERMIS D'ALCOOL (SERVICE D'ALCOOL DANS CERTAINS LIEUX)

Mrs. Albanese moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 8, An Act to amend the Liquor Licence Act in relation to serving liquor in certain places / Projet de loi 8, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les permis d'alcool relativement au service d'alcool dans certains lieux.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: The Liquor Licence Amendment Act (Serving Liquor in Certain Places) seeks to curb the illegal sale and service of alcohol and the operation of booze cans by giving police the tools they need to deter offenders and keep our community safe. This act would create, if passed, a new offence whereby an individual caught illegally selling or serving alcohol would be subject to new stringent bail conditions and additional

penalties. This would help people feel safe on their streets, on their property and in their homes.

**PROTECTION OF VULNERABLE
AND ELDERLY PEOPLE
FROM ABUSE ACT**

(POWERS OF ATTORNEY), 2013

**LOI DE 2013 SUR LA PROTECTION
DES PERSONNES VULNÉRABLES
ET DES PERSONNES ÂGÉES**

**CONTRE LES MAUVAIS TRAITEMENTS
(PROCURATIONS)**

Mr. O'Toole moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 9, An Act to amend the Substitute Decisions Act, 1992 with respect to powers of attorney / Projet de loi 9, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1992 sur la prise de décisions au nom d'autrui en ce qui a trait aux procurations.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. John O'Toole: This bill's intent is to actually provide protection for seniors who may be vulnerable in the latter stages of life, where they're allowed to assign power of attorney and also to register their power of attorney with the public guardian and trustee, also disclosing who can see what within their guidance with respect to personal care or financial support. This is meant to support seniors in providing arrangements in the latter part of their life.

**TAXATION AMENDMENT ACT
(PUBLIC TRANSIT EXPENSE
TAX CREDIT), 2013**

**LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT
LA LOI SUR LES IMPÔTS**

**(CRÉDIT D'IMPÔT POUR DÉPENSES
DE TRANSPORTS EN COMMUN)**

Mr. O'Toole moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 10, An Act to amend the Taxation Act, 2007 to provide for a tax credit for expenses incurred in using public transit / Projet de loi 10, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2007 sur les impôts afin de prévoir un crédit d'impôt pour les dépenses engagées au titre des transports en commun.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. John O'Toole: In today's congested world, we're always relating the inconvenience to people commuting. This is an encouragement—the tax credit that the Minister of Finance could introduce would allow for a tax

credit for persons moving to using of public transit. Any expense for the purpose of using public transit would be a tax credit to a certain amount, as set by the Minister of Finance. This has been in place in San Francisco and other places where transit is an important part of the solution to gridlock.

**STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY
AND RESPONSES**

GREAT LAKES WATER QUALITY

Hon. James J. Bradley: I rise today to fulfill our government's commitment to reintroduce the Great Lakes Protection Act. Today I have the honour of introducing proposed legislation that, if passed by the Legislature, would help restore and protect the Great Lakes so they stay drinkable, swimmable and fishable.

As Minister of the Environment, I have seen the passion of the people of Ontario and the passion that they have for the Great Lakes and their continued protection. I saw an overwhelming response to the Great Lakes Guardian Community Fund launched last summer, a fund to help grassroots groups take action to protect and restore their part of the Great Lakes.

In developing this proposed legislation, we listened to the people of Ontario. We have spoken with people from Lake Superior to the shores of Lake Huron. From Georgian Bay, Lake Ontario and Lake Erie, people spoke clearly about the need for legislation to protect the Great Lakes.

I have met with First Nations around the lakes who maintain a spiritual and cultural relationship with water. We have much to gain from effective partnerships with First Nations to help protect the Great Lakes.

We received valuable public comments when we released Ontario's draft Great Lakes strategy, which was finalized in December 2012. In our listening sessions, we heard the need for more comprehensive approaches.

The proposed act allows for local groups and others to work towards comprehensive solutions for their area. We also heard of the need for clear, science-based targets. The proposed act would allow for the development of these targets. We will continue to consider the input we have received as this bill moves through the legislative process.

Ontario has been hard at work over the last 40 years to protect the Great Lakes, and there have been many accomplishments. But population growth, invasive species, pollution, climate change and other emerging issues are overtaking old solutions, and new actions are required. This is why our government is reintroducing the proposed Great Lakes Protection Act today.

The proposed act would, if passed, give the province new tools to protect and restore the Great Lakes. Natural shorelines and coastal wetlands are essential for the health of the Great Lakes, a lesson we have learned well from our continuing work with the Lake Simcoe

Protection Plan. The shorelines are where people meet and enjoy the lakes, but also where pressures on the lakes are most evident.

The proposed act would, if passed, establish a Great Lakes Guardians Council, chaired by the Minister of the Environment. The council would include other Great Lakes ministers—they would have those responsibilities as well. It will also include representatives of First Nations and Métis communities, municipalities, Great Lakes experts and other groups who have a role to play in protecting our Great Lakes. The council would identify provincial Great Lakes improvement priorities and focus resources on addressing those priorities.

The proposed act would, if passed, authorize the Minister of the Environment to set targets and, following local input, require public bodies to develop and implement initiatives to address particular Great Lakes problems. It would also enshrine Ontario's Great Lakes Strategy in law as a living document that is reviewed every six years to coordinate action and advance Great Lakes priorities.

I'm optimistic that all members of the House will stand with us and be true guardians of the Great Lakes.

1330

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Responses?

Mr. Michael Harris: I'm pleased to take this opportunity to address the proposed Great Lakes Protection Act. The last time the Liberals tabled this bill, there were more questions than answers. They wanted to create another advisory board but didn't specify its membership or explain how much it would cost. They wanted to create a series of different regulations for numerous yet undetermined geographical areas, yet again without providing a price tag or detailing how this additional red tape would affect local governments, farmers and businesses. They wanted to create another regulator for Ontario's shorelines, while giving no particular reason or estimated cost. When asked about these issues, the Liberals refused to respond, leaving stakeholders scratching their heads. At first, it was difficult to determine if this lack of clarity was the result of Liberal obfuscation or incompetence, but it didn't take long for most observers to conclude that the Liberals had yet again failed to do their homework.

As always, the Liberal government remains committed to portraying diligence while in reality doing absolutely nothing. If that means rushing ahead with a proposed law that has less detail than a Liberal campaign promise, the government will gladly do so, as long as it believes the move will improve its political fortunes.

What's troubling about this trend is that the Liberals push these unnecessary policies through the Legislature with little to no forethought. With the recent signing of the updated Great Lakes water quality agreement, we must continue to work with the federal government to meet our binational obligations. This requires "action," a word that's unfortunately not part of the Liberals' vocabulary. When confronted with a real problem or issue, the Liberals almost always call for another grand

strategy, another review, another advisory body, another excuse for more regulatory powers; seldom, if ever, do they summon the courage to, in fact, act.

We all know that there are a number of challenges facing the Great Lakes, such as high levels of phosphorus, invasive species, toxic chemicals and a changing climate. Canada and the United States have all agreed to address these issues. But for Ontario to do its part, we require political will and a government that understands that the economy and the environment are not mutually exclusive. We need a government that offers a holistic approach on the Great Lakes, that protects ecosystems but also develops sustainable infrastructure for tourism, water and waste water systems; a government that understands the vitally important role that the Great Lakes play in our manufacturing sector and broader economy; a government that understands that environmental efforts for remediation and improving water quality require an economic strategy that engages the clean water technology sector and other innovative firms. What we don't need is more delay, more review, more burdensome regulation and more needless bureaucracy. I think it's more than clear that the government doesn't lack legal tools; it lacks the political leadership to get the job done.

Before I finish, I quickly want to outline one of the PC Party's major concerns with this proposed legislation, and that's the provision for more shoreline regulations. Here's yet another classic example of legislative and regulatory duplication created by the Liberals. First of all, the Conservation Authorities Act already gives the government the power to regulate the development of shorelines for watershed management. Then the Planning Act gives municipalities the authority to prohibit development on shorelines. Now the Ministry of the Environment wants in on the action and wants the power to collect fees for violations. The jury is still out on which shorelines the ministry will regulate. That decision is being left up to the Liberals' guardians council, a faceless board that the minister can stack with his supporters and cronies. At no time have the Liberals offered a legitimate reason why the government needs to centralize regulatory power or needs to increase the size and cost of government by adding even more bureaucracy.

I know that members, at least on this side of the House, will agree that no serious piece of legislation leaves so many important questions unanswered and has no price tag attached to it.

I hope the minister has noted some of the concerns that I have raised and addressed here today and will strongly consider them.

Mr. Jonah Schein: It's a pleasure to be back in this House after a long prorogation. It's an honour to speak on behalf of my community in Davenport and speak to some of the pressing issues in terms of our environmental challenges.

I rise today specifically to speak to the importance of the Great Lakes and the need to get the Great Lakes Protection Act right. Millions of Ontarians live next to

and depend upon the Great Lakes for drinking water, for recreation, for tourism and for jobs. The Great Lakes are a key part of our shared ecosystem. There are also significant threats to the Great Lakes: We see invasive species, the destruction of shoreline habitats, pollution, decreasing water levels and beach closures. We need stronger government action to protect the Great Lakes now and for our future.

Unfortunately, the current government has failed to protect Lake Ontario from threats like quarries, from mega dumps, from shoreline development, from industrial emissions, from excessive water-taking and the shipment of radioactive nuclear waste on its waters.

Last year, the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario reported that the McGuinty government's record in protecting the Great Lakes was spotty at best during the last eight years. In addition, this government has refused to listen to the over 100,000 people who have called on them to put a stop to shipping radioactive steam generators on the Great Lakes.

Comprehensive action on the Great Lakes is long overdue. During the previous election, the NDP committed to implementing a Great Lakes protection act that would designate one minister clearly responsible for the protection of the Great Lakes, and we would establish clear objectives and legislation to ensure that decisions by all ministries protect and improve the quality and quantity of the Great Lakes.

We welcome this bill, again, but we need to see more from this government. The previous Great Lakes Protection Act, while a step in the right direction, had some key things lacking. It lacked clear principles to guide decision-making, it lacked mandatory targets and timelines for action, it lacked action to protect wetlands and watersheds, and it lacked regular reporting on progress.

We must do better than this. My New Democrat colleagues and I will be working to ensure that the Great Lakes Protection Act is not just symbolic, and we will work hard to ensure that the act sets strong targets, is adequately resourced, and that it's up to the task of actually protecting our valuable Great Lakes heritage.

PETITIONS

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, which reads:

"Whereas the price of gas is reaching historic price levels and is expected to increase another 15% in the near future, yet oil prices are dropping; and

"Whereas the real reason for the high price of gas is gas companies are putting pressure to allow for the pipeline from Alberta to Texas; and

"Whereas the" McGuinty-Wynne "government has done nothing to protect consumers from high gas prices; and

"Whereas the high and unstable gas prices across Ontario have caused confusion and unfair hardship to Ontario's drivers while also impacting the Ontario economy in key sectors such as tourism and transportation; and

"Whereas the high price of gas has a detrimental impact on all aspects of our already troubled economy and substantially increases the price of delivered commodities, adding further burden to Ontario consumers;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and urge the Premier to take action to protect consumers from the burden of high gas prices in Ontario."

I affix my signature in support, Mr. Speaker.

ELECTRICITY GENERATION

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario Electricity System Operator is poised to procure electricity generation valued at hundreds of billions of dollars in the coming months and years; and

"Whereas community enterprises for electricity generation are democratically controlled legal entities established for the purpose of mobilizing communities and financial resources to consider local electricity generation opportunities with a view to providing benefits to the community and Ontario as a whole; and

"Whereas the commercialization of our natural resources, grid capacity and power purchase capacity can impair Ontarians' ability to mitigate the impacts of clean energy products; and

"Whereas community enterprises provide for local control over environmental assessment processes; and

"Whereas community enterprises can develop sensible proposals and become self-sustaining without the need for more government or government subsidies by generating and selling electricity on a not-for-profit basis; and

"Whereas the proposed renewable energy on crown land policy may encourage and prioritize community economic benefits from water power development and other clean energy projects;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario support a community energy act to help facilitate the mobilization of communities and financial resources for the purposes of developing community enterprises for electricity generation."

I will give this to Charlie.

1340

ONTARIO COLLEGE OF TRADES

Mr. Jim McDonell: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario's tradespeople are subject to stifling regulation and are compelled to pay membership fees to the unaccountable College of Trades; and

"Whereas these fees are a tax grab that drives down the wages of skilled tradespeople; and

"Whereas Ontario desperately needs a plan to solve our critical shortage of skilled tradespeople by encouraging our youth to enter the trades and attracting new tradespeople; and

"Whereas the latest policies from the McGuinty"—Wynne—"government only aggravate the looming skilled trades shortage in Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To immediately disband the College of Trades, cease imposing needless membership fees and enact policies to attract young Ontarians" to the skilled trades industry.

I agree with this petition and I will be signing it.

SPRINGWATER PROVINCIAL PARK

Mr. Jim Wilson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas we oppose the termination of the operating budget for Springwater Provincial Park in Springwater township on March 31, 2013;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"We ask that the park remain operating and facilities such as the animal sanctuary, cabins/shelters, playground equipment and ground maintenance remain intact and operating."

I agree with this petition and I'll sign it.

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: I have a petition here to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas residents of Ontario want a moratorium on all further industrial wind turbine development until an independent third party health and environmental study has been completed; and

"Whereas people in Ontario living within close proximity to industrial wind turbines have reported negative health effects, we need to study the physical, social, economic and environmental impacts of industrial wind turbines; and the Auditor General confirmed wind farms were created in haste and with no planning;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ontario government place a moratorium on the approval of any wind energy projects and a moratorium on the construction of industrial wind projects until further studies of the potential adverse health effects of industrial wind turbines, their effect on the environment, the potential devaluation of residential property are completed; and that any industrial wind projects not currently connected to the grid be cancelled."

I agree and I will affix my name to it.

HOSPITAL PARKING FEES

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present a petition on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Durham. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the United Senior Citizens of Ontario has expressed its concerns over the high costs of parking at hospitals in Ontario on behalf of its more than 300,000 members; and

"Whereas thousands of Ontario seniors find it difficult to live on their fixed income and cannot afford these extra hospital parking fees added to their daily living costs; and

"Whereas the Canadian Medical Association Journal has said" in a recent editorial "that parking fees are a barrier to health care and add additional stress to patients who have enough to deal with" in their illness;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That Ontario's members of provincial Parliament and the Dalton McGuinty government"—they probably mean Kathleen Wynne now—"take action to abolish parking fees for all seniors when visiting hospitals."

I'm pleased to sign and support this and present it to Premier Wynne.

AIR QUALITY

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm pleased to present a petition on behalf of members of my community. It reads:

"Whereas collecting and restoring old vehicles honours Ontario's automotive heritage while contributing to the economy through the purchase of goods and services, tourism, and support for special events; and

"Whereas the stringent application of emissions regulations for older cars equipped with newer engines can result in fines and additional expenses that discourage car collectors and restorers from pursuing their hobby; and

"Whereas newer engines installed by hobbyists in vehicles over 20 years old provide cleaner emissions than the original equipment; and

"Whereas car collectors typically use their vehicles only on an occasional basis, during four to five months of the year;

"Therefore, be it resolved that the Ontario Legislature support Ontarians who collect and restore old vehicles by amending the appropriate laws and regulations to ensure vehicles over 20 years old and exempt from Drive Clean testing shall also be exempt from additional emissions requirements enforced by the Ministry of the Environment and governing the installation of newer engines into old cars and trucks."

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Jim Wilson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas we, the residents of Clearview township and neighbouring townships, oppose the wpd Canada Fair-

view wind farm project on Fairgrounds Road and all wind energy projects in Clearview township; and

"Whereas we support the petition of mayors and councillors from 80 municipalities, farm organizations, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture and the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario, which petition requested that the province place an immediate moratorium on all wind projects until an independent and comprehensive health study has determined that turbine noise is safe to human health, amongst other things; and

"Whereas wpd Canada's Fairview wind project violates the OLS airspace and usability of registered aerodromes in Clearview, including Collingwood Regional Airport and Stayner field, and wpd Canada's draft renewal energy approvals reports do not recognize these impacts or the jurisdiction of the government of Canada; and

"Whereas wpd Canada is seeking final approval from the province for the Fairview wind project prior to completion of the federal Health Canada study and prior to federal actions to protect aviation safety;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario agree and accept that until the federal health study is completed and federal aeronautical zoning is in place, it will immediately take whatever action is necessary to give full effect to a moratorium on all wind turbine development in Ontario, including all projects for which final approval has not yet been given."

I want to thank Betty Schneider for sending these petitions to me.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Jim McDonell: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas families are concerned about the proposed changes to the Special Services at Home Program (SSAH) and the Passport Program under the Services and Supports to Promote the Social Inclusion of Persons with Developmental Disabilities Act (2008); and

"Whereas the system should allow for the seamless transfer of benefits to the Passport Program when the person turns 18 years of age, and not the current unacceptable cancellation of benefits and reapplication process that puts the person with an intellectual disability on a huge waiting list for months for the re-establishment of their benefits; and

"Whereas on September 20, 2012, the Legislature passed a motion by Progressive Conservative MPP Christine Elliott to immediately strike a select committee to develop a comprehensive developmental services strategy for Ontarians that addresses the needs of children, youth and adults in Ontario with an intellectual disability or who are dually diagnosed with an intellectual disability and a mental illness;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The government immediately strike a select committee to develop a comprehensive developmental services strategy for Ontarians that addresses the needs of children, youth and adults in Ontario with an intellectual disability or who are dually diagnosed with an intellectual disability and a mental illness and coordinates the delivery of developmental programs and services across many provincial ministries;

"To declare a moratorium on any changes until the select committee reports back to the Legislature and its recommendations are acted upon."

I agree with this motion, will be signing it and passing it off to page Charlie.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

THRONE SPEECH DEBATE

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 21, 2013, on the motion for an address in reply to the speech of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor at the opening of the session.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate? The Minister of Labour.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you, Speaker. I am very happy to be back at Queen's Park, in the Legislature, talking about issues that are important to Ontarians across the province and, of course, to my constituents of Ottawa Centre.

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First of all, I just want to acknowledge how humbled I feel to be named as Minister of Labour in Kathleen Wynne's government. It is a great honour not only to represent the people across the province, of course, but to continue my advocacy on behalf of my constituents and my community in Ottawa Centre. That's why I felt very compelled to speak about this throne speech, because, in my view, this throne speech speaks to the values that I continue to hear in my riding of Ottawa Centre: values around creating a fair society; values around an economy that is based on fiscal responsibility; values around ensuring that nobody is left behind in our province, be it at an economic front or at a community level.

When I see messages around jobs, economy and a fair society in the speech from the throne, I am very happy to stand here and say those are exactly the kinds of things my constituents in Ottawa Centre have been talking about. Those are exactly the kinds of things they want to see out of their government, where we are strengthening the economy, we are creating jobs right at the local level, but also making sure that we are looking after each other and we are making sure that those who are vulnerable in our community are not forgotten.

As I think I have indicated quite a few times in this Legislature, I visit my constituents door to door on a weekly basis. Over the last few months I was out knock-

ing on doors at least three times a week. I do this on a weekly basis, a regular basis. You really get an opportunity to talk to your constituents. You really get an opportunity to hear what issues are important to them—not just doing this at election time, but doing it in between elections, because that's when people are talking about and discussing issues that are important. The issues that I have heard about and the initiatives that we've been working on in my riding very much speak to what has been articulated in the speech from the throne.

Let me talk about jobs, for instance, something that we're concerned about in all parts of the province. We are especially concerned about jobs in Ottawa, as we have seen up to 10,000 jobs being cut from the federal government. For most of my constituents who have been directly impacted by these federal job cuts, the question is, how do we help create those jobs? How do we re-integrate those individuals who live in my riding of Ottawa Centre back into the workforce? How do we harness their incredible skill sets so that they can continue to grow a strong economy?

I'm really happy to say that the government decided, for instance, to extend the coverage of the Eastern Ontario Development Fund, or EODF. The EODF, which has been a very successful program—brought in place in 2007, a roughly \$20-million-a-year investment in eastern Ontario—had most recently, until 2011, excluded urban Ottawa. Essentially, all of eastern Ontario and also the rural part of eastern Ontario was covered by EODF—companies and employers were able to take advantage of EODF—but not those small and medium-sized businesses that are based in urban communities. My riding, Ottawa Centre, as you can tell, is right in the heart of Ottawa, and a lot of these businesses, very innovative businesses, were not able to get access to this funding. I was really happy to see that the government expanded the coverage of EODF so that businesses in urban Ottawa can take advantage of that as well. I know that Invest Ottawa, which is Ottawa's economic development agency, is working very hard with small and medium-sized businesses, taking EODF and leveraging those dollars so that we can create jobs and particularly be able to target those federal civil servants—again, a lot of my constituents—who have lost their jobs because of the job cuts taken by the Harper government and be able to create jobs through private businesses in our community.

Another great initiative taken by our government most recently to help create jobs and a great entrepreneurial spirit in Ottawa is the announcement to build the accelerator centre, the innovation hub, in my riding of Ottawa Centre at Bayview Yards. For those who know Ottawa, Bayview Yards is a very vibrant part of my riding, but it's brownfields; it is contaminated land which has been sitting idle for some time. By working together with the city of Ottawa, under the leadership of Mayor Jim Watson, we are building Ottawa's first accelerator centre, or innovation hub, the same as the likes of MaRS, or Communitech in Kitchener-Waterloo.

Given the size of our city, we did not have such a centre, and I'm very excited that the province is investing

\$15 million to build an innovation hub right in my riding, in Ottawa Centre, at Bayview Yards, which is just a great place to build such a centre, to create the creative cluster. It's right on the LRT station that will soon be built in Ottawa as well, thanks to our government's \$600-million investment in partnership with the federal government and the city of Ottawa. Also, the O-Train station goes to Bayview Yards as well. It's a central location which is going to help all across the city and create jobs, especially jobs for youth, and helping those youth to create businesses—another very important theme in the speech from the throne.

Another issue, a second important issue that I continue to hear, of course, is education. Speaker, we know that all parents want to make sure that their children receive the best education. We want to make sure that they go to good schools, be they in junior kindergarten, senior kindergarten or doing their postgraduate work at Carleton University.

I'm very fortunate to have some of the best schools, some of the best teachers, located in my riding—actually, I would say three boards: the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, the Ottawa Catholic School Board and the French Catholic school board. All these schools have been very active in the community. Of course, the kids are very engaged, doing a lot of different, exciting things.

Given that we are in a downtown riding, we do have a challenge around school infrastructure. A lot of the schools located in my riding—some of them are celebrating their 100th year. They were built around the turn of the century. They are iconic buildings, beautiful architecture, but of course they are showing age. Given the technology that we are so used to and putting in schools, it's important that we invest capital dollars in renovating these schools.

I'm really happy that Mutchmor Public School, which is located in the Glebe, in my riding, is receiving \$4.6 million to build a permanent addition. We've had some serious challenges in terms of accommodation of students, especially in French immersion and regular classes. The work that we've been able to do with the school board—this investment is going to ensure that both students from First Avenue Public School and students from Mutchmor Public School will be able to be accommodated properly. It's a very exciting announcement.

But that was a very small part of the announcement, because if you look at the English public school board, the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, we're investing in Ottawa \$47.9 million in schools across the city in the English public system: \$15.4 million for Longfields-Davidson Heights public school; in addition, \$10.6 million for Earl of March school; \$5.3 million for South March Public School; and \$12 million to build a brand new school in Kanata North. I know that through the French board we're making investments in Ottawa-Orléans, in the riding that's represented by MPP McNeely, and across the city. It's important investment because it ensures that our students have good places to

learn, that they have healthy environments in which they can get a good education. An extremely important priority for this government is investment in education.

I also have the great fortune to represent Carleton University, which is located in my riding; in fact, I don't live too far from Carleton University. There, again, we continue to see some incredible investments that are going on, keeping in the true spirit of this speech from the throne. One in particular I will mention is the almost doubling in size of the library at Carleton University, the MacOdrum Library. It has been there for some time, and of course the university is growing because of our continued investment in the post-secondary sector through the Reaching Higher plan. We need to double the size of the university, and I'm really happy to note that the Ontario government is investing \$14 million in the library at Carleton University. Actually, the architecture is beautiful. I've seen the design as I pass by every day when I'm home. Through Carleton University, you can see the incredible construction that's going on.

1400

Of course, all of this work also creates jobs. They're creating real, meaningful, tangible jobs right in our community.

The other area which is, of course, very important to communities all across—and my community is no different; it's something that I hear often about—is health care: making sure that we've got good health care available to our communities. On the health care side, in my end, there are two things that I hear about. One is on the prevention side of the equation, to make sure that we are making investments to ensure that people are not getting ill, that they are taking all the necessary steps to be healthy. I do a lot of work with community health centres in my riding, which are just an amazing ambassador around prevention—looking at all the social determinants of health, taking the necessary steps so that our community members are healthy, especially those who come from vulnerable backgrounds.

At the Centretown Community Health Centre, Speaker, most recently, we announced the SCREEN program, which is a diabetes prevention program. In fact, the day of the announcement, I went through the whole process as to what members of the community go through to determine whether they are susceptible to diabetes or not. The day that I was there to announce the additional funding for the SCREEN program, the Spanish-speaking Latin American community was targeted. You had all the nurses, the physicians, the social workers who were there—the dietitians who were there were fluent in Spanish—going through the whole process to determine the risk factors, to be able to, if risk factors are high, work with these community members so that they can prevent getting diabetes and all the subsequent negative impacts of that. So that's an important thing around prevention, and there are many examples like that in my community and in communities across Ontario.

There are also things like making sure that we get good primary care right at the community level. A great

community initiative that I'm really proud of—something that my community in Ottawa Centre and particularly the neighbourhood of Hintonburg has been advocating for—is to create a community health centre hub, a Hintonburg Hub, as we are calling it, where we can bring the primary health care providers, we can bring social workers, we can bring dietitians, we can bring support for seniors all in one place.

This particular neighbourhood in my riding is rather unique because there was a lack of health care services. The closest thing was a hospital, and the last thing we want when people are not feeling well is going to the emergency room, because that's not the place for them to get care. By making an investment in the Hintonburg Hub, we are actually creating a one-stop shop in my riding where local residents can get care.

This particular hub, which is getting roughly about \$350,000 a year in operational funding through the Champlain Local Health Integration Network, or Champlain LHIN, which is responsible for Ottawa, will allow roughly 1,200 new patients to be looked after per year. That's a very significant outreach to a vulnerable community, making sure that they have health care services available to them just down the street, as opposed to going somewhere farther.

If I look at the location of the Hintonburg Hub, which is being placed at Rosemount Avenue, you've got a seniors' residence literally half a block away, so those seniors—it's community housing—are able to walk and to get services right across from the location of the Hintonburg Hub. We have a nursing home, a long-term-care facility, that's also available. There are homes or residences that are run by Salus for people with mental health challenges. That's right across the street, really a great location where people can get services, especially those who are vulnerable and more susceptible to getting illnesses. We can work on the prevention side by making this very important investment. I want to congratulate my community. I want to congratulate the board and the executive director of Somerset West Community Health Centre for their advocacy in making this very important investment.

Another important issue is looking after seniors or people with disabilities, again ensuring that they continue to live in their own homes as long as possible, because that's where people are healthy. As I am out in the community, knocking on doors, talking to seniors and their children, they all tell me that they want to live at home. They want to make sure they are able to get services closer to home as opposed to going to a nursing home or a long-term-care facility.

Most recently, through Champlain LHIN, we announced \$11.1 million toward community care in Ottawa, really going to the essence of the action plan on health care that Minister Matthews laid out, which is part of the speech from the throne, where we are again ensuring that people are living at home longer. They're getting care within a community setting at the right time, at the right place, as opposed to going to the hospital, which is another expensive model of getting care.

This additional \$11.1 million, which is on top of what is already being invested, is a very significant investment to ensure that various agencies in my community of Ottawa Centre are able to provide community care through health care providers and social services providers on a community level. Again, I congratulate the Minister of Health for that very important investment through the action plan on health care.

The last thing I will mention on the health care side of things, Speaker, which I think is also very exciting, is that you may recall Minister Matthews announced two birth centres to be created as a pilot in Ontario for low-risk births. One is in Toronto, and most recently, the minister announced that the second will be hosted in Ottawa—an amazing initiative. The community is absolutely excited that another alternative model of delivering babies is being acted upon and the second site is located in Ottawa. Ottawa is very suitable as the second location, because we are a bilingual city, so we can obviously collect data and can serve both English-speaking and French-speaking communities, not to mention that we have a huge rural part to the city of Ottawa that can also have access to this birth centre.

So again, a lot of exciting things are happening in my city of Ottawa, and particularly in my community of Ottawa Centre, all speaking to the core values of this speech from the throne, and that is to build a sustainable economy, an economy that is creating new, innovative jobs. The high-tech sector, of course, is an important element in Ottawa, creating things like an innovation hub—the one I mentioned at Bayview Yards—but also putting the seed for building a fair society, where we look after the vulnerable, where we look after our elders, to make sure they have the services they need so much.

So when we're making investments in things like birth centres or expending funding for community care for patients with Parkinson's or Alzheimer's, we are really making sure that members of our community are getting care at home where they are most comfortable, where they can live with dignity—investments in places like Hintonburg Hub, of which I can speak for hours, because it's the kind of project that I think we need all across the community. We're bringing different community service providers to one location and are able to then serve our residents.

That's how we create a fair society. These are the practical aspects of that translation, so to speak, by which we can create a society that looks after the vulnerable, to make sure that nobody is falling through the cracks. I'm really excited that we have seen these core values outlined in this speech from the throne, and I encourage all members to vote in support of it. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We have questions and comments. I look to the member for Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry.

1410

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'm proud to rise and comment on the Minister of Labour's issues with the throne

speech. I looked hard at the throne speech and looked for something that would give us some reason to support this government, but all we see is more spending.

It was a little over a year ago that this government received a report from a hand-picked consultant of theirs, Don Drummond, who had over 300 recommendations. We've seen a government here that ignored almost all of those recommendations on how to get their finances in order.

I think they're ignoring the point that this province is in serious trouble. We've got a province that's got a debt that's escalating—they've doubled the debt in nine years. They've got a deficit that is out of control. They have numbers that show that they're going to get it in control by 2019, but there's no evidence of what's going to happen after 2014, as the individual department numbers are missing. I think that just speaks for the lack of a plan.

The province of Ontario deserves a government that stops mortgaging our future, our children, and tackles the jobs issue. I have a son that had to go out to Alberta to look for a job. He received a good education in Ontario from Queen's University—he's an engineer. His friends in Toronto—no jobs. We're talking about a federal system that's short on science and technology jobs, but engineers can't get a job in Ontario. It just shows that all our industries are moving out west where the price of power is less—all the inputs, all the things that make us competitive are less.

It's time that we take action and look at making Ontario competitive again.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I am so pleased to be back in this chamber after a prolonged period of prorogation—the three Ps—a terrible period of which I don't think has ever cast this legislative body in a deeper shadow.

I'm here to respond to the response from the throne, or the response from the new minister—and I congratulate you, Minister, on your new portfolio. You would mistake him easily for the minister for Ottawa because he concentrates solely on the specific benefits and positive aspects of Ottawa, but I ask you, Mr. Minister, to broaden your horizons now that you have gotten into the big chair, and realize that the challenges that face this province are ultimately at your feet as well. I look forward to working with you on that file; of course you know that.

Some of those challenges, members would know, are still present, even after prorogation, those challenges in regard to unemployment. I come from the Windsor-Essex county area, where unemployment levels are at nearly 10%—stagnant growth, an enormous youth unemployment rate; an issue that hasn't been addressed by this body in a tangible way in nearly a decade.

We have had a mass exodus of manufacturing from our area without a tangible response and a manufacturing strategy from this province, and the government absolutely abdicating the responsibility to our manufacturing in this province, as they have abdicated the responsibility

to the people of the province through prorogation. They left. They shut the doors, shut the lights off and walked away from their responsibility.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that New Democrats are anxious to bring about some of the more tangible remedies to the problems that the people of this province face, and we look forward to doing that in the coming weeks.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions or comments?

Mr. Mike Colle: Certainly it's the first time I've ever heard a member of the opposition criticize a member for speaking about his own riding. I mean, that's what we're here for. We're representing our people.

The Minister of Labour—the member from Ottawa Centre—is in love with the city of Ottawa. He's in love with Ottawa Centre, and he's talking about all the great people who live in Hintonburg, the great people who live in the Glebe. Although, I was upset he didn't mention the people who live in maybe the most exciting part of his riding, and that's Westboro.

You've never been to Westboro? Everything is happening in Westboro. The streets are filled with people; there's restaurants. The only bad thing that's happening in Westboro—you wouldn't know this—but we're losing a landmark in Westboro.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: The Newport.

Mr. Mike Colle: The Newport is closing down. Shame, shame. The Newport is closing down. I don't know how they let Moe close the place down, especially when Elvis was there a couple of times. They saw Elvis there twice. He was there twice. The best—

Interjection: Did he leave the building, though? We want to know: Did Elvis leave the building?

Mr. Mike Colle: Hey, listen, the deep-dish pizza at Moe's place in Newport is to die for. It's worth the drive to Ottawa to go to Westboro to go for the Newport pizza. Even in Sudbury, you can't get pizza like that. It's an exciting place. In Ottawa Centre, things are happening: great neighbourhoods, seniors living beside young people. It's an active, vibrant part of this province; it's a great part—great universities.

Anyway, the member from Ottawa Centre is proud of Ottawa Centre and he's proud of the Ottawa Senators. The only mistake he's made is that he's let Moe close down the Newport, and I say to him, shame on him for allowing that to happen.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: It's a pleasure to stand here in this chamber once again, actually getting back to work and coming here to try and impress upon the government how important it is to actually make some real changes. Unfortunately, from the speech from the throne, we haven't heard anything new. In fact, what was disturbing to me was to hear the new Premier say that she is going to continue the legacy left behind by Mr. McGuinty. That is very concerning. When you woke up this morning and there were 600,000 Ontarians without work—the min-

ister, I'm sure, has great intent. I know him, obviously, as well-spoken, but words are as hollow as an old tree that has been standing there for too long—too long, like nine years. Here we have hollow words, but we don't see any action from this government.

Unfortunately, this is what the province of Ontario needs: We need a government that's actually going to implement policies that are going to address the job crisis and the debt crisis that we are facing right now. Unfortunately, this throne speech does neither of those. It doesn't address the 600,000 people that are out of work in the province of Ontario, and it doesn't address the \$12-billion deficit that we have this year.

I'm very concerned with the way this government is going to steer this ship, again, in the wrong direction. It's the wrong direction. The minister knows it's in the wrong direction, and we need some real measures.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments. We return to the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker. Let me first thank the members for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, Essex, Eglinton–Lawrence and Northumberland–Quinte West for their comments.

Let me just get this straight, for the record: Newport in Westboro is not closing; it's just relocating down Churchill Avenue. You can come by, and that pizza is still there. The sister of the good member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke also lives in Westboro, in the great riding of Ottawa Centre; she's very active in the community, so I thank her for her service to the community.

Mr. John Yakabuski: She moved.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: She moved recently?

Mr. John Yakabuski: She moved; I told her to get out of your riding.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: But this is exactly what I was doing: I was giving concrete examples, just from my riding, as to how this speech from the throne is reflected. You can see in action the kinds of great things happening on the jobs front, on health care and on education in my riding of Ottawa Centre. The member from Eglinton–Lawrence is right: I will never get tired of talking about my riding of Ottawa Centre and all the people in Ottawa, because that is my number one priority and so it will remain, but I think it is also important that we work together. Collaboration is key.

Let's not kid, from any side of this House: This is a minority Legislature, which means that the people of Ontario want us to work together. The people of Ontario are saying, "Find common ground and put that in action." Nobody is saying that we are all going to agree on every single thing; people are smarter than that, but when I'm out in my community—like I was just last Saturday—when I'm knocking on doors and talking to my constituents, they are telling me to work with the opposition, as I'm sure their constituents are telling them to work with the government. That is what we need to do, and as a member of Premier Wynne's government, as the Minister of Labour, I'm telling all my colleagues on all

sides of the House that I look forward to working with you. I look forward to working with my labour critics and I look forward to working with all members.

1420

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate on the throne speech? The member for Durham.

Mr. John O'Toole: Before the member from Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke has a small coronary, I'll be splitting my time with him as well on this 20-minute rotation.

Where does one start? I did attend the throne speech; I copiously took notes. They said 56 times in this speech—"the new government"—there's nothing changed. That's the cynicism of the remarks. Even the media response to that was clear that, in the light of prorogation of the House for almost four months—128 days—under a very deep shadow cast upon the whole energy file—and the Premier resigned and subsequently the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Energy have left.

So it certainly tells you that there's something wrong in the state of Denmark. If you look at it, the broader public would know from the media's thorough reporting on the Ornge scandal—the great work done by Frank Klees, our member from Aurora—and then the whole issue of question period has been consumed by the issue of the gas plants. What's missing there is any fragment of a real report.

Three times they've had three different implementations of new-found information. Now we find some of the information was filed and classified under a code name. I think it was called Vapour—that was just one of them—and Banana was another one. It leads me to be completely suspicious of this government. In fact, I have to say publicly to my constituents that there's an element of lack of trust here, completely, on anything they say—and that, in the first few days, is losing trust, losing confidence in a government.

In the sort of deflection, from trying to change the channel from the scandals that were here, the new leader has really replicated pretty much everything in the past. She's still deflecting the questions on contempt to the House leader, and some people are saying here, "The worst House leader ever." This is what I hear often in the Legislature.

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: I would have to say—but in fairness—Mr. Speaker, with all the noise here, I've struck another chord. It's clear, where there's that kind of reaction, spontaneously, we know there's some kind of—I wouldn't say cover-up, but I would say there's something wrong here.

I would say that it was the Ornge helicopter scandal, the gas plant scandal, the contempt motion, the complete mess-up of the energy file, completely—I could speak at length, all of us—and my colleague, Mr. Yakabuski, could speak on the file with some knowledge as our critic, Vic Fedeli, does every day here.

Even more locally, the Slots at Racetracks Program was cancelled for very suspicious reasons. Some are

suspecting that there's a collusion between OLG and the government—I won't get into that. But there is so much at risk here that the people of Ontario want answers; they want transparency and accountability.

Mr. Speaker, I look in my riding of Durham: How do these things relate to the people that I serve? Each of us should always drive back to the people that brought us here. In fairness, Ms. Wynne—and I congratulate her on being the leader, the first woman; those are achievements—could make a difference here. She should just say, "Look, from now on I'm telling the truth as I know it." And I think people would understand that.

But in my riding, here's what I see is wrong: The Slots at Racetracks Program is very devastating for veterinarians, for trainers, for dealerships that make trailers or sell trucks, the breeding stock. I think of Tara Hills, the fine breeding farm, one of the finest breeding farms in Canada, almost put out of business overnight through no fault of their own but from a change of policy by a government with absolutely no consultation.

The continual promises to deliver GO Transit to the people of Durham failed, and it's still not there, and I don't see it even in the capital plan, the Big Move plan, the \$50-billion plan that they're now out consulting. Where's the money? They have no idea. The energy file is screwed up; the transit file is screwed up as well.

The 407 east is another slap in the face to Durham region. It was promised in the election that it would go right through to 35/115. What have they done? They've broken it out. I put to you, Mr. Speaker: That's another promise to Durham that has failed, and Highway 407 will not be to Durham until after the next provincial election, if at all. I've lost confidence, quite frankly.

I would like to give the new Premier—well, the partner of Premier McGuinty; she was in cabinet, so she knew all this stuff was going on—a chance here. The only way she can do that is to stand up tomorrow and say, "Look, I'm resigning." Well, not resigning but, "I'm going to start again." I would put to her on the record now that she should say, "I want to start all over again," and have a new throne speech, do you understand? Because what she's doing now is just continuing the litany of failed promises and obfuscation, if that's permissible.

I would say the other thing that I find is the refurbishment of the nuclear plants, and not only that, but the commitment to close Pickering by 2015. That again is completely false. That's not going to be closed until about 2020, if at all. You can't actually trust this government. Now, what our leader—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I have to caution the member for Durham: There are a number of members who are concerned with a comment that the member for Durham made, and I would ask him if he would consider withdrawing it, please.

Mr. John O'Toole: I'll withdraw, if it offends them, and not conditionally as well.

Our leader, Tim Hudak, has said this very clearly and very politely, I should say—I'm surprised at his decor-

um, that he's not completely outraged. When you've been lied—pardon me, when you've been dealt with—

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: I withdraw that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm going to again caution the member that he has to be careful with his language so as to allow the debate to take place with a degree of—I know he would want to ensure that his language is consistent with absolute decorum in this House. I'll ask him to withdraw, and return to the member for Durham.

Mr. John O'Toole: Withdraw. I've got a laser-light focus from now on.

Here's what I say: We want a better Ontario. What our leader is saying all the time is that we want a better Ontario, and to accomplish this, we need to change the team.

They have a bigger cabinet, and I would say—I didn't say a better cabinet; I said a bigger cabinet. There's Rick Bartolucci leaving; obviously, it's not better. When I look at the papers here, I want to say that there are several things in the media that the public should pay attention to—not because I said it; I'm just repeating it. For instance, one example of the way they do government is back-loading contracts. I think this is what's happening in the public sector. There's going to be a two-year wage freeze, and then they'll back-load it. What they'll do is give them retroactive increases.

What they're doing now—this is on the record. They gave 8.5% to the OPP as a kind of top-up at the end. They also had—most people would know this—with OPSEU, in 2009, 2%; in 2010, 2%; in 2011 and 2012, 3%. Then they slipped in an extra, secret 1%. This was found by the auditor, I believe. These are the kinds of things that undermine the people of Ontario's confidence in this government, new or otherwise. It's the same old government. Nothing has changed.

Another big one that people need to pay attention to is the whole issue that's been written about as the pension Ponzi by the writer Tufts. Here's what happened. Right now the public sector sunshine list under McGuinty—these are over \$100,000—has moved from 20,000 to 80,000, okay? Anybody making over \$100,000 who retires at 55 and actuarially lives to 84 will make \$1 million. Pardon me, they'll make \$2 million. Where is that money coming from, because the OPSEU pension—all the pensions—are in deficit at the moment. These are very disturbing consequences for the people of Ontario.

I can only say this: The evidence is in. In their own commission report from Don Drummond there are 362 recommendations. There's enough in these recommendations that should serve as a very informed guide to what you need to do. And I can tell you that on the very last page in the last remarks—before the member from Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke steals the show here—Drummond says what action is needed fiscally: Health care has to be held to less than 2%; education to less than 1%; post-secondary, excluding training, to 1.5%; social services to 0.5%; and all other programs by -2.4%. The

evidence is in. Even Drummond is saying it and everyone is saying it: You can't spend your way out of this. It's time to hold the line on new spending, and that's not what was in the throne speech. There's no hope for the future until we have a new team on the field. Thank you very much for the opportunity.

1430

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much. It's always a pleasure, though not easy, to follow the member for Durham, because he comes here with a breadth of knowledge that is unparalleled in this Legislature and covers a lot of different subjects in very great detail.

I'm not going to correct him because I think it may be just a math issue. I know my good friend John was probably making a point, but I can factually say that in this throne speech—and I highlighted and counted them. I really felt bad for the Lieutenant Governor that he actually had to deliver this document, because part of the convention is that the Lieutenant Governor, whoever he or she may be, delivers the throne speech on behalf of the government. It had to be pretty tough for the Honourable David Onley on this one because, my goodness gracious, what a vacuous document. It's an empty vessel. An empty vessel, Speaker: If you fill a drum with stuff and you bang it, it kind of goes "clunk," but if you have an empty drum and you hit it, it just goes "bong." There's this big echo because it's an empty vessel. That's exactly what we had with this throne speech—full of platitudes.

Getting back to the new government's big announcement by the new Premier—yes, she is the new Premier. She's the 25th Premier in the history of this province, and I congratulate her for that. It is not a new government, but it was in this throne speech no less than 16 times, where they addressed it as "the new government," "your new government." There's nothing new about this government. As my good friend Bob Runciman, now an honourable Senator in this country—and, I would put it to the folks on the other side, maybe the best opposition House leader in the history of this province—said, "McGuinty or McWynnetty: no difference; no change." That's a scary thought. Yet she calls this "the new government" no less than 16 times.

Do you know what they're trying to do? They're trying to put a new coat of paint on an old house, but it's not going to work, because the people of this province are on to you. They are on to you. While you folks were on holidays for 127 days, trying to decide who you're going to saddle with the next mess that your last guy gave you, while you were on holidays touring around your ridings—or the member of Ottawa Centre, now the Minister of Labour, was knocking on doors—you see, the people of Ontario were actually tuning in. They were starting to pay attention to the abject mess that you have created and that you want to leave them with.

Don Drummond, your handpicked philosopher, says that my friend John O'Toole has it right. You can't spend your way out of this, yet you want to try to convince

people with these hocus-pocus phrases like “a fair society.” It reminds me of Trudeau, going back 40-some years ago: the “just society.” Well, now we have the “fair society.” Do you know what people really want to know—what kind of society? Have they got one that they can pay the bills in? Have they got a society where they can actually make ends meet? Have they got a society that will offer them some hope, maybe a job, if you’re not working for the Ontario public service? Is there a job out there that does not include working for the Ontario public service in the McWynnet Ontario? Is there one? I don’t know.

Then they wonder why our leader, Tim Hudak, said, and rightfully so, “We will not be supporting this throne speech.” You know, you can’t—

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: We didn’t have to read it; we had it read to us by the—again, I feel sorry for the poor Lieutenant Governor, who had to deliver this document. But you cannot expect that our party, that is committed to changing the direction, the downward spiral that you have put this province on—we are going to turn it back up and give people hope—that we are going to succumb to this crap of a document—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Clearly, the member’s comment has caused some distress in the House. I would ask him to withdraw his unparliamentary—

Mr. John Yakabuski: I withdraw, Speaker. If you’re only worrying about when I cause distress in this House, I’m probably never going to be able to speak again, because I cause these people endless distress.

You know why I cause endless distress to these people over there? I tell it like it is. I tell the truth. You know, where I come from, Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, that’s what they want to hear.

This document—they figure we’re going to support it because they throw a few baubles. A few baubles and trinkets, and they figure that Tim Hudak and the PC Party are just all of a sudden going to say, “Oh, yeah, we’ll support the throne speech.” You know what? It would be wrong for us to support this throne speech because it would be an abdication of our responsibility to the people of Ontario to sell out for a few trinkets and baubles. This province has to be corrected. The train wreck that you have put us on has to be stopped. There’s only one way to do that, and that is to change the government.

I want to touch on a couple of things that my colleague from Durham was talking about as well. After 127 days of prorogation, you’d think that they would have come to the conclusion that the only acceptable outcome for the people of Ontario with respect to the Mississauga and Oakville gas plant closure, cancellation and relocation scandal is to come clean. So the new government and the new Premier—

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: She tried to. Well, she tried to fool us. You see, she goes public and she says, “I’ll be

appointing a select committee to study this issue,” and the minute that two honourable members of this Legislature—Rob Leone from Cambridge and Todd Smith from Prince Edward–Hastings—decided that their rights as members could not be the subject of an extortion on the part of the government—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I’m going to rule that comment out of order as well. I would ask him to withdraw.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Withdraw.

The government demanded that we back off, that we withdraw those motions in order for them to go to a select committee. So it’s like, “We want to get to the bottom of it, but we’ve got all kinds of strings we’re going to attach to it because we really want to control the agenda. We don’t want these motions of contempt or privilege to proceed.”

Well, we’re not available for sale, folks. The morals over here are not available for sale; the ethics are not available for sale. And the people of Ontario’s right to know what happened with respect to those gas plants? That’s not for sale either. You’re going to have to fess up. Whether or not the auditor’s report is going to help, we’re not sure; we’ll have to see. We’ll have to see because, you see, that’s the other thing, Speaker: People out there don’t really necessarily understand that before we ever see the auditor’s report, they’re going to have seen it for a long time. They’re going to have chances to study it, peruse it; they’re actually going to have a chance to respond to it. By the time we see the report, it’s already going to have their report on it. It’s going to have their spin. They’re going to already be spinning their story. As the Premier said last week in question period, “That’s my story,” and I guess they’re going to stick to it.

But eventually the truth is going to come out, whether it’s during a campaign—maybe we’ll be able to get it out then; I don’t know. Maybe we won’t even have the report yet. But if not, if we are honoured and privileged to be elected, whenever that next election comes, we’ve committed to one thing: If these people won’t tell the truth, we’ll appoint a judicial inquiry to get to the bottom of it with regard to those gas plants.

I want to talk a little bit about another issue, and I don’t have much time, but I was in my riding on Friday. I met with a number of people about the absolute catastrophe that is going to be foisted on the people of Ontario if they continue with their craziness with respect to how they implement the Endangered Species Act. There has to be massive changes or the economy is going to be harmed even more than these people have already. I know that’s hard to believe, Speaker. It’s hard to believe that you could do more harm to this economy and to this province than those folks already have done, but if there aren’t significant changes made to the process with regard to the Endangered Species Act, it’s going to get even worse.

1440

I’m going to speak about that a little more at another time when I have more opportunity, but I only have 10

seconds left. The bottom line is, Speaker, we cannot support this empty, vacuous, ridiculous document that does nothing to turn the course of a province that you've put on a downward—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Questions and comments?

Mr. Paul Miller: The members of the opposition certainly described in detail what they thought of the throne speech, but I also would remind them that the white paper can also be on a roll in a certain room in the House as well.

The item here that I want to discuss is that the whole situation that we're in now—we had Ornge; we had eHealth; we had the LHIN problem; we had the gas plant problem. Let's face it: They thought, by proroguing the House, that that would all go away. It hasn't gone away.

I'd like to remind them—I congratulate Kathleen Wynne on her win; no pun intended there. The bottom line is that Kathleen Wynne was elected by the Liberal Party. She wasn't elected by the people of Ontario.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: There's no mandate.

Mr. Paul Miller: There's no mandate there, so I'm telling you that that's going to change. It could be a short career.

I really get irritated when I see the House leader stand up and try to blame the opposition parties, because saying that the gas plant fiasco, "they voted not to build"—you're right. We voted not to build it in the first place. They built it and then, with two weeks to open up, they shut it down to save seats. That was a political move. That was a disgrace. It cost this province hundreds of millions of dollars, and I'll go through the list again if you'd like. They have blown more money, which I could have sunk into health care, social programs. I could have maybe even helped the racing industry that they want to close, which is another profitable organization. Who knows what they're going to close next? It's really scary.

They have no direction. The new Premier—it was a document full of promises again, and to date, since McGuinty took over, they've broken over 135 promises. Nothing has changed. We're going to get more of the same.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to be given an opportunity to speak, following my colleagues from Durham, Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke and Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

I can't believe this. We're here to debate the throne speech, and the opposition is not focusing on the topic of the day. Let me remind the opposition members what your government, the Harris government, did to the city of Toronto with regard to the Eglinton line. Let's remember that, okay?

Let's also remember how much we have invested: the largest investment in the city of Toronto when it comes to public transit. So don't give us the line about not supporting public transit and transportation. It is unacceptable that my colleagues opposite have not read the

throne speech, and to criticize—and it's right there in the throne speech, talking about the transportation network.

Let's remind each other, please, that before you speak and open your mouth—I remember very clearly, as a young girl, my mother said, "Before you open your mouth, read the contents." I don't believe they did, Mr. Speaker.

In my short time, I want to focus on fiscal responsibility and accountability. That's what the throne speech talks about, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): On a point of order, the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Speaker, that member is impugning another member. Speaker, if I didn't read the throne speech, it would have been very hard to underline the 16 points where it was said that this was the "new government." For goodness' sake—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That's not a point of order. That is not a point of order. But I would perhaps be wise to remind the House at this time that questions and comments are supposed to relate back to a member's speech.

I return to the member for Scarborough–Agincourt.

Ms. Soo Wong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to conclude by remarking in my short time to focus on fiscal responsibility and accountability.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Point of order, the member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

Mr. Paul Miller: Point of order: I'd just like to remind the member that she made kind of a whole statement covering everyone in the opposition. We do read the budget—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That's not a point of order either.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I said it's not a point of order.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It's not a point of order. A point of disagreement is not a point of order.

Questions and comments?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke made a wonderful speech in the House, pointing out exactly what bothers the people of Ontario. Of course, the fine people of Renfrew and Pembroke are known for their straight talk and their straight listening. That's why this member ends up with such a huge majority in his riding, because he does nothing but give his constituents the straight talk they deserve.

I was interested in the member's closing comments. He talked about the bill, the endangered species bill, which is a typical piece of legislation, the type of legislation this government brings in: no research, no

consultation, no regard for the consequences of what they're doing, no cost-benefit analysis.

It's exactly what they did to the horse racing business. They didn't talk to anybody. They knew best, and after they got involved in it, they found out they were making a huge muck-up of what was a very dynamic and successful industry in Ontario. And that's what you're doing with the Endangered Species Act. You can't expect the landowners, primarily farmers—farmers were never mentioned once in the speech from the throne. The Premier is also the Minister of Agriculture and also the Minister of Agriculture and Food. She didn't mention farmers once, and farmers will bear the brunt of that piece of legislation for endangered species.

You can't ask a farmer to set aside five acres here, two acres there, to harvest his wheat late, to harvest his hay late. The protein level of hay is never higher than when it first comes into bud. If you wait two or three weeks to harvest hay, you're losing the protein value of that hay crop. You can't ask individuals to suck up the cost of your mismanagement as far as new legislation is concerned, and nothing personifies that better than the Endangered Species Act.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Prue: I listened intently, as I always do, to the member from Durham and to the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke because it is important for me to try to understand the Conservative psyche, to understand what makes them think, what makes them tick.

Now, a throne speech is a difficult thing. If ever there is an ethereal document on the face of this planet, that is it. It is how many pages? Seventeen, 18 pages of a whole bunch of very vague promises, promises which you have to read over and over and over again to even try to even get a kernel of truth out of it, to try to find even the slightest direction about where this government's trying to go.

I am still puzzled after listening to the members in this House. I am still puzzled after listening to the Premier, the cabinet ministers and everyone else as to what is exactly in this document. It is a whole lot of mostly nothing. Let us all be very honest about this. It is a very broad direction with no specifics, and people ought not to get too, too excited about it.

So when I listened to the Conservatives, the very first thing they said is that they're going to vote against it. Well, that's fine. Tell me what in this thing you're going to vote against. You're going to trigger an election on this document that the public doesn't understand, that the politicians don't understand and that doesn't say a whole lot of anything. I listened to them and they said they're not going to support the throne speech. That's fine. But I've also heard them say they're not going to support the budget, and that's a budget that hasn't even been written or tabled yet, and I have some real difficulties with that. Probably they'll have good cause not to do it, but I think they owe it to their constituents and everyone else to at least look at it first and then make that decision.

I listened to the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke and he said that they're not for sale. Well, I'll tell you, they may think they're not for sale, but they're willing to sell the LCBO, the 407, the OLG, and everything else seems to be for sale. Maybe they might want to talk about that, too.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. That concludes the time for questions and comments, and I return to the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I appreciate the comments from the members of Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, Scarborough–Agincourt, Halton and Beaches–East York.

When I say we're not for sale, our ethics and our morals are not for sale, and they never will be. But I will agree with a couple of the comments from the member from Beaches–East York, when he agrees with us and says there was nothing in this throne speech.

But on the principle of voting for or against the throne speech, Speaker, you have to ask yourself: If you vote for this throne speech, then you are approving, in principle, the path that this government is taking this province. If you have a shred of—

Interjection: Here it comes.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Yes, I've got to rephrase this. If you have a shred of integrity, and you look at this document and you ask where Ontario has been for the past nine years and where this government intends to take it, and if you believe that you have a commitment to the people of this province of Ontario, you have to ask yourself: Do I make a statement that I have confidence in this government and vote for their throne speech? Or do I stand on principle and let the chips fall where they may, and let the people of Ontario know that, "No, I do not have confidence in this government. I do not have confidence that the document that was read to us in this House last week will take Ontario in the right direction"? Then, I am morally bound to vote against it.

On the other hand, the NDP play games with throne speeches and budgets. They may show up for the budget to vote. They may be there to vote when the budget comes. We're not sure. They may not show up for the throne speech debate.

But I can tell you that on this side of the House, on this part of this side of the House, in the Progressive Conservative caucus, when we take a stand on something, it will be based on solid principles, and we will not waver.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Miss Monique Taylor: I'm also pleased to be back in the House after a long break away from this House, a place where I was elected to come and represent my residents. I'm very happy to be back. I'm also pleased to have the opportunity to be able to speak to this throne speech.

But first, I would like to mention how I appreciated the Lieutenant Governor's reflection on one of his

predecessors, the Honourable Lincoln Alexander, who passed away last October. Lincoln Alexander was a wonderful servant to the people of Hamilton. He blazed a trail not just in Hamilton but all across this country, acting as a spectacular role model for young people of every race. As we know, Lincoln Alexander was the first black politician elected to our federal Parliament. He was the first black cabinet minister. He was the first black Lieutenant Governor of Ontario. February, of course, is Black History Month, and it is fitting that we take this opportunity to honour his achievements and reflect on the positive impacts that he had on so many lives.

I listened with interest and anticipation to the throne speech. It was, after all, the first that we have heard in this Legislature since way back on October 15 of last year. Despite the unprecedented turmoil—the Ornge fiasco, the blocking of the opposition's attempts to get to the bottom of exactly what happened in the cancellation of the gas plants in Mississauga and Oakville, the government's creation of a crisis in our education system—despite all of that, this place was silenced—silenced so that the Liberals could avoid the accountability that we in opposition are elected to do on behalf of our constituents—I wanted to repeat it just to make sure that you got it—on behalf of the people of this province; silenced so that the Liberals could regroup and try to get their own house in order.

We had heard in the weeks leading up to the throne speech, during the Liberal leadership campaign and particularly following that from the new Premier that she wanted to do things differently, that she wanted to turn the page, that she wanted to work with us on this side of the House to make this minority Parliament work for the people of Ontario. So, as I said, I listened with anticipation to what that actually means in the throne speech, and what I heard did seem to reflect some of that philosophy. I heard that the government “does not believe that we are irreparably divided.” I heard that the government “will create a better process to ensure that all its partners, including those within the public sector, are treated with respect.”

One of the first paragraphs in the speech read, in part, as follows: “Your government intends to work with opposition parties, in a spirit of renewed co-operation, to get the people’s business done.” It was certainly good to hear those sentiments reflected in the earlier part of the throne speech, and I looked forward to hearing exactly just what that means as the speech progressed. Unfortunately, that never came.

What we were treated to was a wide-ranging address that was generally positive but at the end of the day was really very vague. It lacked details and was devoid of any concrete plans for the upcoming session, and that is what we are going to need to see when this throne speech is reflected in the upcoming budget.

It may have escaped the notice of the government, but Ontario families are feeling squeezed. They are finding it harder and harder to make ends meet. They are finding it harder and harder to find jobs, harder and harder to

access services that they need, and they want action on the part of this government that’s not just vague declarations.

We in the NDP have put forward some concrete ideas, ideas like our First Start program, a realistic program that would help create jobs for youth. Our province badly needs something to address the growing problems of our unemployed youth. Figures from last year indicate that the unemployment rate for those between the ages of 16 and 24 is 15.7%, nearly double that of the population in general.

Yes, the government has indicated that they’re willing to help young people get on-the-job training, but yet again we don’t know what that means, and we’re still waiting for those details. Meanwhile, the NDP’s First Start program outlines some real results for our youth: 25,000 jobs over two years, each lasting a minimum of four to six months. Participants will be developing new skills while training on the job, and they will earn at least \$12 per hour for at least 30 hours per week. A government wage subsidy of up to \$7,800 would be provided. This program would emphasize moving these newly trained and motivated young workers into long-term employment positions. Smart private sector employers will use this opportunity to train young workers, with government support, to build their workforce of the future. That’s the sort of real action that we need to see in the budget: meaningful programs that will have real results for Ontarians.

I was very disappointed to note that the government did not commit to immediately giving Ontario drivers a break on their auto insurance. We do need to tackle fraud, but that won’t happen overnight, and Ontario drivers deserve better now. In 2011, insurance companies were able to save \$2 billion thanks to the changes in government policies, but despite hearing for two years that we will see lower rates, none of those savings have been passed on to drivers. In fact, the premiums have gone up 5%.

I was contacted by a young constituent who was giving serious thought to his future, and he was trying to make some sensible choices. This young man knows how important it is to have his education. He wants to continue to further that so that he can build a life for himself. But he also knows that there are costs to doing something about it. To help pay for his way through school, this young man sees an opportunity in landscaping. Makes sense: summer months; generally downtime for school and also a prime time to take care of our properties. So he developed a detailed plan to establish a landscaping enterprise in Hamilton. He has it all laid out. He has the materials, the equipment he needs, the hours he will work, all associated costs and of course his income.

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The problem is that he can’t efficiently walk from client to client pushing a lawnmower or carrying a weed whacker, a spade, a rake and the extra gas that he needs for his equipment. No, if you’re going to do it right and

you're going to have a business plan and be successful, you need a truck and probably a trailer to get you from job to job. And that's where the big obstacle lies—not in the cost of the truck or the trailer and not particularly in the insurance that he would have to pay for his truck. He had quotes as high as \$8,000. We all know that young males tend to pay higher rates until they have established a driving history for several years, but that seems to be a huge amount to have to pay. It is making it impossible for my young constituent to fulfil his goals—goals which I think we would all agree are admirable and deserving of our support.

This government can take some real action. As we have suggested, they should step in and ensure a 15% reduction in auto insurance rates. That move would save the average Ontarian \$226.

Mr. Speaker, the throne speech also said that the government would ensure opportunity for all without letting anyone slip through the cracks. That's a bold statement and one that I'm very happy to hear, but I have to wonder if this government realizes just how many people are falling through the cracks. It's encouraging to have a government indicate that they will allow Ontario Works and ODSP recipients to receive all of the first \$200 they make. We need to see the details, but on the surface that move would appear to need some help.

That is just a tip of the iceberg. The cuts to the community start-up allowance and maintenance benefit are having a devastating effect on my riding of Hamilton Mountain and across the province. I know that myself and members across the House have had many meetings with organizations talking about the devastating effects that these cuts are having on the people in our ridings. And that's in every single one of our ridings. These cuts are going to create homelessness. They're creating more poverty. People count on those rates and those extra monies to be able to make up for the hydro that they're falling short on and they're having their lights shut off; when they're paying the last month's rent to help them get a fresh start in a new apartment; to help them make up for furniture when they've had bedbugs. Having these kinds of cuts just isn't working for families or single people. They're barely making enough as it is on OW or ODSP. They need those extra funds to be able to get through the hardships and times that they just can't make up for. So I really hope that you're looking at those cuts and will return those benefits back to the people.

People are falling through the cracks with programs and the services that our young adults and young people with developmental disabilities are facing. We continue to hear stories of families who simply aren't being able to get the support they need to care for their loved ones—heart-wrenching stories of loving parents whose lives are an exhausting, full-time commitment to caring for their severely disabled children. These families are in desperate need of help and support. The crack that exists when children with developmental disabilities transition to adulthood is very real, and many, many people are

getting caught in it. When it comes to autistic children in need of services, we're not talking so much about the crack rather than the huge hole that they're falling into. We know that the earlier we can provide therapy to autistic children, the more effective it will be, yet in Ontario we have 1,700 children on the wait list for IBI treatment, and that's currently more than who are receiving it—1,700 children who have been diagnosed have been referred to IBI treatment but are still on the wait list for up to four years.

Mr. Speaker, the throne speech also indicates a willingness to get seniors the home care they need so badly—again, an encouraging sign and something that we in the NDP have promoted.

I constantly hear from constituents who are worried that they're not able to provide care for their aging spouse or their parents to continue to live at home. Often times, they don't need much, just a small helping hand, perhaps when they first come home from their hospital stay, or maybe just some help doing regular household tasks without which they would lose their independence.

It makes no sense at all that we have an added expense of extra days in the hospital when, for a lot less, we could have those people back in their homes living productive, independent lives. It makes no sense to drive people toward long-term-care facilities, where the spaces are already scarce, when a cheaper option, an option that is better for the individual, exists.

That's why we've put forward very workable proposals, a proposal that will get people an assessment of the need for home care within five days. We know the fiscal challenges that are being faced by the province, and it makes no sense that we are not doing what we can to wisely spend what we have. Our proposal just makes sense, and I hope the government follows through with it.

Speaking of fiscal responsibility, it's beyond time that we moved to close corporate tax loopholes and, we need to see action on that when the budget is presented. We need the government to close the employer health tax loophole that allows larger business to take advantage of an exemption that was intended for small business. By all means, keep the exemption on the first \$400,000 in payroll for small businesses, but when the payroll goes over \$5 million, that exemption should be removed.

We also need to look at the HST input tax credits. Currently there are restrictions on those input tax credits put in place in 2009. Those restrictions are temporary and apply to large businesses and financial institutions for things like meals and entertainment. It's hard to believe that we could even contemplate allowing large corporations making huge profits to write off the HST when entertaining their clients. When we are making cuts to people who are in desperate need, how can we possibly justify that? But that's what's in the plan for a few years down the road. We can make those restrictions permanent rather than let them expire in 2015. In doing so, we would be saving \$1.3 billion each year.

Mr. Speaker, last year's Drummond report recommended limiting corporations' ability to move profits and

losses from province to province to decrease the amount of corporate taxes they pay. We can also move to limit corporations' ability to shift profits earned in Ontario to foreign subsidiaries, which they do for the same reasons. Although the government has indicated that they will move forward on some corporate tax compliance issues, they have not been clear on where they stand on these issues. They said in the throne speech that they would take a balanced approach to balancing the budget. Well, here is one opportunity to demonstrate their commitment to just that. I would suggest to them that if they are serious about not letting anyone slip through the cracks, then they need to take a serious look at some serious steps with respect to corporate taxes.

Mr. Speaker, over the course of the last year, the government has made a real mess of its relationship with the public sector workers, and in the throne speech we saw what might be an indication of a different approach. They say that they will "sit down with its partners across all sectors to build a sustainable model of wage negotiation ... respectful of both collective bargaining and a fair and transparent interest arbitration process."

There are some nice words: "respectful," "fair," "transparent." It's good to hear them because they certainly weren't evident in the actions of the government over the last year. But it also says "build a sustainable model," and I wonder what that means. Without details it's pretty hard to know.

What we do know is that Ontario has a long history of collective bargaining. We have a model that has proven its sustainability, a model that has served us well. It was stripped away, undermined, if you like, by Bill 115, leaving education workers feeling betrayed in a government-manufactured crisis, a crisis that saw our students paying the price.

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Improvements could be made, but I hope the government has learned from their mistakes of the past, and I look forward to the interpretation of "respectful and fair" as we move forward. Once again, the proof will be in the pudding.

Mr. Speaker, as we debate this throne speech, I'll wrap up by repeating that although the throne speech is vague and lacks detail, we can support it. There is a lot of positive language in there, but at this point it's just words. If we're going to be able to support the budget, there are going to have to be some real results for the people of this province, real action that will address the concerns and needs that I'm hearing from the people of Hamilton Mountain.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Shafiq Qadri: At the outset, I would like to compliment and recognize my honourable colleague the member from Hamilton Mountain. I think, unlike others in this chamber, she did not only read but also dissected and brought forward a number of aspirations that I think we in the government share in this new spirit of entente and cordiality.

I would also like to say, Speaker, that one of my aspirations in this two minutes is not to be asked, unlike many Tory members, to withdraw any particular remark that was either egregious or outrageous.

I'm, of course, always pleased to follow the always level-headed remarks of the member from Beaches East-York.

I can tell you that I'm honoured to be the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Government Services, the Honourable Harinder Takhar. I can share with you, for example, some of the initiatives in our own ministry that are directly, hopefully, attempting to implement some of the new aspirations for a fair society. Whether we're dealing, for example, with the Ontario photo cards—so 1.5 million drivers in Ontario—people who do not drive now have ID; the four-in-one birth registration in which you're are able to maximize your legal status here in Ontario; the fact that we have nine different service guarantees now offered and a whole range of services; the fact that we've expanded, for example, health-card-issuing centres from 37 to 300 across the province, including northern and rural Ontario.

Again, Speaker, aspiring to move fully into the modern digitized world, we'll be moving on a number of fronts to offer government services available online.

That is, of course, a small snapshot of some of the issues that we're busy working with at the Ministry of Government Services.

I would again like to compliment the member from Hamilton Mountain, who, I think, is animated, certainly, by her concern for the constituents she serves, as she voiced, with fiscal responsibility, health care and education.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Listening attentively to the comments made by the member from Etobicoke North and the comments made by the member from Hamilton Mountain, you'd almost think that there was a courting process, a wooing, if you will, going on here between the Liberals and the NDP. Of course, many of the younger people wouldn't know what courtship is, but it almost seems like this is what we're seeing.

It's quite indicative, however, Mr. Speaker, that if the Liberals are courting the NDP and going down the same path that we went down last year when the budget was presented, we see increases in spending. Of course, the new Premier has increased her cabinet by 25%. These are the kinds of indicators that would lead us to believe that this Liberal government is not serious about actually taking austerity measures to the next level, that are going to bring this province back in line and on the right path that we need to be on, to get more jobs created in the province and get our spending under serious guidance here. There's a lack of leadership over there, Mr. Speaker, and it's disconcerting.

I would like to say, though, that the member from Hamilton Mountain does eloquently present her case in the courtship between the Liberals and the NDP. But

again, it really is disconcerting to myself and our party. Mr. Hudak has obviously said it best: Things aren't working; it's time to change who is leading the team here.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm pleased to follow the debate and the remarks from my seatmate, the member from Hamilton Mountain.

I want to comment on something that my good friend the member from Northumberland–Quinte West is trying to formulate here: some sort of courtship. I'll remind him that prior to prorogation, the only dates that occurred between any parties in this House were in the imposition of Bill 115, where the Liberals and the Tories got together to give it to the teachers. What you've seen now is a reversal. Once that date was over with, we've seen the Liberals do a 180 on 115. Now there are roses and flowers going out of every door in this chamber.

Mr. Speaker, I can hear the same type of rhetoric that the Tories are anxious to go to an election. I can only surmise that they're anxious, that the internal brass—the party brass in the PCs—are anxious to get rid of their leader, because he's doing so terribly in the polls. I tell you that we do not. We want to keep him in his seat for as long as we can. He's one of the best things to ever happen to the Progressive Conservatives. So keep him around for our sake, please. We love it when he talks. We love it when he gets out there and presents his white papers, because they have absolutely no content whatsoever.

What we are doing here, I think, is the practical, prudent, responsible, respectable thing, the thing that Ontarians are demanding of us: that the people who are elected to represent them in this province actually take a look at the challenges that are faced by those people and offer some solutions, offer some remedy, but offer some energy. Get in here and do the work. Add your ideas, add your submissions, make suggestions and amend the laws so that we can find some compromise.

We are ready to do that. I think that's a really reasonable thing. That's why our leader, Andrea Horwath, has been so widely applauded for the way she has governed this party and ultimately will govern the province of Ontario; I'm certain of it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Dipika Damerla: I'd like to begin by congratulating the member from Hamilton Mountain for a very eloquent speech. She spoke very passionately, and clearly she has actually read the throne speech—I have a feeling many of the members who have been speaking haven't read the throne speech—so thank you so much.

I also want to thank everybody else who spoke, including the members from Northumberland–Quinte West, Essex and, of course, my colleague here from Etobicoke North.

I'd like to also say that I want to thank my colleague from Hamilton Mountain for her support of the throne

speech. She was very supportive and very complimentary, so thank you so much. I look forward to working with you. I want to assure her that, as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Community and Social Services, making sure that Ontario's most vulnerable are looked after and don't fall through the cracks is indeed a priority for me.

I also wanted to say that it appears the member from Northumberland–Quinte West appeared to be a little envious of the courtship, as he characterizes it, that is going on between the Liberals and the NDP. I just want him to know that he is invited to the party. He is welcome. It's a shame that they don't want to work with us, that they don't want to come to the party, but the invitation is still open. You are welcome. I look forward to working with you instead of rattling for an election.

It does appear that the member from Northumberland–Quinte West seemed to suggest that he is ready for an election, which is very, very disappointing given that clearly the people of Ontario want us to work together to make this minority government work. That was the essence of the throne speech, and it is very disappointing that the member does not agree on that important point.

He also mentioned the need for a focus on the economy and balancing the books. If you read the throne speech, the first paragraph does deal precisely with balancing the books.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments. I return to the member for Hamilton Mountain for her reply.

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Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd also like to thank the members from Etobicoke North, Northumberland–Quinte West, Essex and Mississauga East–Cooksville.

I'll tell you, we are here to work together. We are here to make a minority work. We are here not to prop up a Liberal government, but to get real results for Ontarians. I am sorry that some people in this House refuse to get to that work. It's unfortunate for the people of Ontario, for their constituents, that they find that spending money on an election before even looking at what's being brought forward is more important than putting that money into services that are going to actually help the people of this province.

I'm looking forward to seeing the budget speech. I agree: There was a lot in the throne speech that was very vague. We all know this, but there was nothing in there that I could disagree with. We need to be looking at these things and saying, "Yes, there are no meat and potatoes, but it's something to look at." It's something to at least wait for the budget and give it a chance. People elected us to sit here, to work together, not to run to the polls every time we see it politically fit. I would rather see that money go into services.

You're putting forward positions for people with developmental needs who need a transition period. If we're wasting money, how are we ever possibly going to find that transition-period money?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Hon. Teresa Piruzza: I'd like to mention that I will be splitting my time with my colleague the member from Mississauga East—Cooksville this afternoon.

What a privilege it is to get to stand before this House to speak to the government's speech from the throne, an event that we know marks the beginning of the second session of the 40th Parliament of the province of Ontario. I want to preface my speaking time by saying to each and every colleague of mine in this House that I sincerely hope we can all work together in this very important session of Parliament. It's going to take all of us rolling up our sleeves and getting to work on behalf of our constituents who sent us here, and I remain optimistic that we can do that.

When I meet with my constituents back in Windsor West, I'm constantly reminded of one thing: We truly have amazing communities. No matter which part of the province you're from—Windsor, Thunder Bay, Ottawa or Toronto—we all share the same values, hopes and dreams as Ontarians and as Canadians, and we all come together to work together, to make our communities strong and to make our province strong. Ontario truly is a great place to live and to raise a family.

I believe the same also to be true between the three parties within these chambers, and that is, as the throne speech states, there is more that unites us than divides us. As I walked through the main doors of this Legislature the day after the throne speech was read, not only as the MPP for Windsor West but also as the Minister of Children and Youth Services, I was and I'm still convinced that the priorities outlined in the throne speech last Tuesday reflect all our concerns.

Our Premier and our government have shown a path forward for this minority Parliament to work, and I'm looking forward to working together to make a difference. The vision and the direction laid out in the speech from the throne is one of strong economic stewardship, helping to create jobs and grow the economy.

I was born and raised in Windsor, a city that intimately knows the importance of economic stewardship. Jobs and the economy are our priorities. A stronger economy means more jobs and greater prospects for the people of Windsor and Ontario, which is why the elimination of the deficit by 2017–18 is a critical element to the future expansion of our economy.

I believe that our government has outlined a path that provides a prudent path to a strong and more efficient economy. Premier Wynne has met with opposition party leaders to explore common ground and establish priorities moving forward, and I hope that they can come to some of those priorities and common ground together.

One of these priorities is on youth and ensuring they have the opportunities in life to be successful. Youth in this province hold the key to our future success, and it's imperative that we give them the tools they need early on. We must teach them to work together and to believe in themselves. We must help them feel safe, and take their ideas and their input seriously.

Every young person, every child, has the potential to contribute to our communities. We must ensure that all our children have the supports and opportunities to reach their full potential. That's why, as mentioned in the speech from the throne, our government will create a permanent Premier's Youth Advisory Council, a council that I believe will pay huge dividends to both our youth and our economy.

We know, and we've heard, that one of the biggest problems facing our young people is unemployment. Too many youth are still living at home, unable to tap into the labour market. To address this serious issue, Premier Wynne has a plan. Our government will be joining forces with high school educators, colleges, universities, training partners and employers to establish opportunities for young people to enhance their skills. Success demands collaboration. We cannot do it alone. Our government will get more youth into the job market through internships and co-op programs so they can gain valuable real-world experience.

As the former executive director of employment and social services for the city of Windsor prior to being elected to office, I couldn't agree more with the approach of working with our partners in these areas to find a path forward for our youth, to build on their education, their skills, their abilities and their strengths—our greatest resource in this province.

I'm also proud of the government's Poverty Reduction Strategy. This strategy has made progress over the last four years in helping children and families emerge from poverty and raise their quality of life. Yet we know there is still more to do. I know this is an area of concern for all three parties, and I know it's something we will work collaboratively on to continue to champion.

Through careful, thoughtful reform, we will ensure that the challenging path individuals must navigate through social assistance is not made unduly hard. Proper reforms will enable individuals and families to keep more of what they earn through their hard work and reduce barriers to leaving social assistance—reforms that I know will make a true difference to families across the province—another common priority of all parties, Speaker.

We will also continue to build the strongest and most innovative health care system in the world. It's about being innovative. It's about doing what's right for Ontarians as we move through the 21st century. It's about promoting partnership between health care providers, from hospitals and long-term-care homes to our community support services and front-line medical providers through community health links—all, of course, so that the care of our loved ones and our most vulnerable citizens is constant and cohesive.

I also think it's very important to note our government's commitment to ensuring a respectful partnership with our labour leaders. I believe all my colleagues in this House, as well as thousands of students across the province, were pleased to see, this past Friday, our leadership partners at OSSTF agree to putting extracurriculars back in our secondary schools. I know I spoke

to many students over the weekend—having teenagers—and they were quite pleased to see that they would be again playing volleyball, baseball and all their sports this spring.

I would like to congratulate our Premier and new education minister, as well as the leadership from OSSTF, on working together the past few weeks to make this happen.

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Speaker, I'm encouraged by the feedback I've been receiving back home from our partners in labour, in business, within the not-for-profits, and within our communities following the throne speech. I hear time and time again from everyone I speak to that they want to see this House working together. They want to see us collaborating and making a difference for our families and our communities. They do not want to go to an election. They, along with Ontarians, want us to work together, to continue to weather the terrible economic storm that was delivered to the world, and to continue to come out ahead like Ontario always has, all while at the same time not forgetting that The Way Forward has three components, as we outlined in the throne speech: the requirement for a strong economy, a fair society, and an effective Legislature.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Mississauga East—Cooksville.

Ms. Dipika Damerla: Speaker, I rise today to speak to the throne speech. Before I continue, I want to say that it continues to be a privilege and an honour, as well as a pleasure, to represent the good people of Mississauga East—Cooksville.

I believe that the throne speech is essentially an expression of a government's value system, its governing priorities. It's an expression of the kind of Ontario we want to live in, an Ontario that is at once fair and economically vibrant.

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that a fair society is only possible when you have a strong economy. That is why it astonishes me as to how often people think that a strong economy, a free, vibrant market economy, is somehow mutually exclusive with a fair society. That is where I believe the opposition gets it wrong, because they do believe, or seem to believe, that they are mutually exclusive. But the fact is that they actually work hand in hand. The reality is that a fair society is only possible when Ontario is economically strong, and that is why this Liberal government has boldly staked its ground. We will balance the books, restrain government spending so that our economy continues to strengthen, and we will do this without compromising on social justice. That is the Liberal way; that is what this throne speech is about. This is what Ontarians deserve: nothing more, nothing less. This is what they elected us to do.

That is why the throne speech sets out as its priority a continued commitment to balancing the books by 2017–18, a jobs strategy with a focus on youth, and an infrastructure strategy that recognizes that if Ontario is to continue to be an economic power horse, we need to

make sure our infrastructure keeps up with the 21st century. More importantly, we have to make sure and have the courage to make the difficult decisions that we will need to to ensure that we have the infrastructure we need.

That is why the throne speech also commits itself to grassroots democracy, giving communities more input on what economic investments they want. The reality is, there is no perfect investment. They always come with some pros and some cons. It is important to give communities a choice in the pros they can live with and the cons that they cannot live with. However, what is often missing when communities make these decisions is the unbiased facts that would allow them to make an informed decision. This throne speech recommits itself to not only giving communities more of a say in what kind of investments they get, but also the information they need to make judicious decisions.

Mr. Speaker, the throne speech also makes a commitment to implementing the recommendations of the Frances Lankin-Munir Sheikh report on social assistance reform. As the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Community and Social Services, I have a particular interest in this. Especially, I would like to dwell for a minute or two on how this report is an example of how what is good for the economy is also good for social justice.

Take the idea of allowing people on social assistance to keep more of what they earn. This is the perfect marriage of helping the vulnerable and, at the same time, helping the economy by taking away the perverse disincentive that exists today that stops people from looking for work. That is the essence of what we mean when this government says that good economic policy and good social policy can and do work hand in hand. This idea that good economic policy and good social policy should work to amplify each other is the leitmotif of this throne speech and this government.

The government services that Ontarians rely on are the bedrock and the foundation of the fair society that we so cherish as an ideal. That is why this throne speech rededicates itself to building and strengthening our relationship with all of the stakeholders that make it possible for Ontario to deliver the services Ontarians rely on, from education and health care to social services. So indeed it was very good news when we heard that in high schools, teachers can now go back to providing extracurricular activities.

In fact, there's a student in my riding who is running for student rep for the Peel region, and his election platform was going to be bringing back extracurriculars. So when he heard this news he said—I won't use his exact expression, but essentially he said, "Oh my God, I've got to now change my platform, but good news all around."

Finally, this throne speech recognizes that the good people of Ontario expect all three parties to work together to make a minority government work. This is what Ontarians said on October 6, 2011, and this throne

speech makes it abundantly clear that this Liberal government is open for business when it comes to working with the opposition parties. So it is indeed disappointing that the official opposition has decided to vote against a budget that is yet to be written—yes, it's yet to be written. That, to me, is an abdication of the official opposition's responsibility, as well as a disservice to the Ontarians who voted them in as the official opposition.

It is also disappointing that the official opposition has chosen to vote against this throne speech. I want to know just which part of the throne speech are they against? Is it the part that commits the government to balancing the books and focusing on job creation? Is it the part that commits the government to a fair Ontario? Or is it the part that the government commits itself to an effective and functional Legislature? Or is it just crass politics and a total disregard for the people all 107 of us were elected to serve? These are very important questions, and I look forward to hearing answers to these from the official opposition when it is their turn to respond to my comments. I would like to applaud the third party for the support they have shown to the throne speech and the open mind they have to the budget.

Once again, I would like to reiterate what this throne speech is about. It is about a way forward that creates a strong economy, a fair society and an effective Legislature. This is what the good people of Mississauga want. They want jobs. They want good schools. They want a reliable health care system. They want dependable infrastructure. They want the government to give a hand up for those who are down on their luck, and to be able to hold up our head with pride and say we are from Ontario. That is what Ontarians want from us.

What they do not want is an uncalled-for election. It really is surprising to me that the loyal opposition on the one hand says they want to balance the books; on the other hand, they're perfectly willing to spend \$300 million on a self-serving election that would probably not serve them as well as they think. It's just not clear to me as to how all of this fits in with being a responsible government.

Finally, all I want to say is that what the throne speech promises is a government that works, and I'm going to ask all 107 of us in this room to work together to implement that vision.

1540

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? The member for Barrie.

Mr. Rod Jackson: Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. It's good to be back after 127 days back in the constituency listening to my residents and their concerns, and I'll tell you what they are concerned about. In no small way, they are concerned about a fair society.

I'd ask you to imagine for one minute what a fair society would mean if we actually didn't have to pay to service a debt and a deficit that's three to four times the size of the rest of the country put together. Imagine if that money could go towards those who are less fortunate. Imagine if it went to front-line education, where we

could actually have EAs making what they deserve to make. Imagine if we could actually train them properly so they could deal with children with special needs in their classrooms properly without using blocker pads, padded rooms and padded cells. Imagine if we actually put our resources into things that actually matter to Ontarians and not into paying our debt and deficit, which is the mess that you guys got us into for the past 10 years and refuse to take responsibility for. You refuse to take responsibility for everything and try to put it all over onto the opposition.

You know what? You need to stand up and take responsibility just one time for the mess that you've put us into in this province. To actually stand up and say that we're not respectful and we don't care, we don't have any social conscience—well, I have news for you. The Progressive Conservative Party was founded on social conscience, on family strength and on actually taking care of people. You know what? You can't afford to pay your bills until you pay off your debt. At least that's the way I run my household.

Until you learn that, until you learn that you've had 10 years to fix the problems of this province and you've done nothing but put it into the hole even worse, we're never going to solve this problem. It's time for fundamental change. No more tinkering around on the fringes; get down to business, get to the crux of it, do your job, govern Ontario properly, or step aside and let us do it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? The member for Oak Ridges—Markham—sorry; York South—Weston. I apologize.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to say, first of all, that I'm very glad to join this debate on the throne speech. I want to say that this is, traditionally, a document that is called a high-level document, a document that gives vision, that gives direction.

I want to say that, personally, I feel optimistic and inspired by what the throne speech contains. I am not usually a very critical person who may see the negative in everything. What can it accomplish for the people of this province? Well, first of all, yes, we are committed to balancing our books, and we are committed to be responsible and transparent but, at the same time, we also have to think of the future. Building a strong economy, finding those good jobs, helping the people who are most vulnerable, giving them a hand up, having sound infrastructure for our province: This is all very important. It's all important to the people of Ontario. To those families that work every day and come home, they want to know that we're trying to work together effectively here in this House. That's what we've been elected to do.

Yes, at times we can get partisan. We all come here with different opinions. That's okay. We have to find a way, a consensus, though, to move forward. That's our responsibility as elected officials. So let's find a way to work together.

I want to say to the member from Barrie—"You got us into this mess." The world has been in a global recession. Everybody should take responsibility, yes, but so should

the opposition; not only the government. We did have three balanced budgets before entering the deficit when the recession began.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jim McDonell: It's a pleasure to get up, after 127 days of not sitting in this Legislature, to respond to Mississauga East-Cooksville's talk about the throne speech.

It's unfortunate, when we look through this—and, really, there's nothing in this throne speech, nothing that dealt with jobs or dealing with the fiscal reality.

Maclean's magazine from just last week talked about the state of the provincial debt. To quote it, ". . . the Macdonald-Laurier Institute found that Ontario's debt was worse than that of California," a state that was issuing IOUs because it couldn't afford to issue tax refunds, and "the Fraser Institute is even less kind," saying that a new study shows that the debt "is exactly where Greece was in the 1980s...." It just talks about the seriousness of the problem we're in.

I think it's time that this government owns up to it and brings Ontario back. Yes, there are some tough decisions, but I think we need to look at making some decisions now that will allow us to ensure our future is not just mortgaged on our children—it's easy to spend money, and it's easy to print money. It was also interesting that they suggest that Ontario is the most likely province to default in the next 30 years.

These are serious issues. This is Maclean's magazine, unquestionably not a conservative paper, but these are issues they're trying to bring up with people, trying to wake them up to the cold reality this government is bringing us to. Maybe we could buy a subscription for all the members on the other side, and maybe they could look at some of these warnings that are coming from the financial world. If we don't act soon, we'll lose our ability to act and we'll leave it to our debtors to make decisions.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I have to say that when I heard the throne speech last week, it seemed to have everything for everyone. I thought to myself, "Can a government deliver so much to so many people when they have nothing in the cupboard?" How can you deliver anything to anyone when your deficit is 12 billion bucks? Yet you've got a direction and a vision and an inspirational throne speech that attempts to give everything to everyone. In the end, I say, is there actually anything in that throne speech? If I were they, I would have been a little more focused about what I think we could achieve. To give everything to Liberal supporters, to a great extent, and to Conservative and NDP supporters—I don't know. To me, in terms of believing all that, it fell a bit short, I would say.

I was concerned and worried for the new Premier in terms of where she is going. I don't find it visionary, I must admit. I must admit it wasn't inspiring. But it did

make me feel good, because it gives you the sense that maybe she will look after us. And for some people, feeling good about something is an important part of politics.

I've got to tell you, from a New Democratic perspective, that we're going to wait for the budget, because that's when we are going to see concretely what the government intends to do and what, practically, they're going to put in the budget to make something happen in the short term, over which she has some control, and in the longer term, over which there may not be any control, because we could be into an election in the next year or year and a half.

I'm looking forward to the budget, Speaker. That's where we're going to meet with the Liberals on that one.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That, I believe, concludes the time for questions and comments; there have been four.

I return to the Minister of Children and Youth Services for her two-minute reply.

Hon. Teresa Piruzza: Thank you, Speaker. I'd like to thank—I hope I get these right—the members from Barrie, York South-Weston, Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry and Trinity-Spadina for their responses to our collected words on the throne speech here this afternoon.

There are questions that I'm hearing in terms of what was in this throne speech. As I read it, the throne speech is our vision; it's our direction; it's how we're going to move forward.

As I indicated, there are three essential components to this throne speech. It's about having a strong economy. How do we speak to the strong economy? By continuing to balance the budget; by transforming services throughout government, using creativity and innovation, to ensure that we are receiving value for every dollar we spend in our communities.

Second, it's about our fair society. It's about working with our communities, strengthening our relationship with our communities, with our partners, to ensure that all our families are able to reach their full potential.

1550

It's about an effective Legislature, and that, Speaker, is the key. I think it's the key that every one of us needs to recall. Why are we here? We're here to work for our constituents. What do our constituents want? And nobody can tell me that they haven't heard this from their constituents: They want us to work together. They want us to act like adults, to say, "Yes, we have differing opinions, but we all have the same values. We all want the same thing for our communities. We want jobs. We want our education system. We want a strong health care system." We all have the same values, Speaker, and we all need to work together on it. Yes, there will be differing opinions, but you know what? As adults, we sit down, we talk about those differing opinions and we come to a consensus. We come to some kind of a collaboration. We have some level of accountability in working together, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'm pleased to rise today to respond to the recent speech from the throne.

Before I get going, Speaker, let me say that I'm going to be sharing my time this afternoon with the member from Kitchener-Conestoga.

I have to say that I was optimistic and excited to return to Queen's Park. I was hopeful for the upcoming session, hopeful that after four months Premier Wynne would finally break the McGuinty padlock and open democracy's door, returning the House and getting MPPs back to work on behalf of the ridings and the people that elected us. I had hoped that this House would see real change and that Ontario would finally be able to move forward.

Sadly, after a week of being back here at Queen's Park, it was very evident that absolutely nothing has changed. The government party is sitting in different chairs. They have different titles and new business cards. But just as a zebra can't change its stripes, neither can the failed McGuinty-Wynne government.

Speaker, in a moment of total *déjà vu*, we learned late last week of more secret documents relating to the canceled gas plants. Project Vapour, Project Apple, Project Fruit Salad and Project Banana are all code names that this government used to hide and conceal its operations and activities. After months of promises from the McGuinty-Wynne Liberals that there were no more, we find that there are more hidden documents, more secrets, more code words and more cover-ups, Speaker. The language of the recycled Liberal caucus—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Yes, in the past, that particular word has been ruled out of order, and I would ask the member to withdraw his unparliamentary remark.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I withdraw.

Speaker, as I was saying, we found that there are more hidden documents. I think the bombshell from the Ministry of Energy floored every member in this House in the opposition benches. We're not sure if the government knew that those documents were coming or not, but obviously, by the reaction from us, we were totally, totally surprised.

The language of the recycled Liberal caucus, as I was saying, remains the same. The excuses are the same, and still nobody is willing to pay the price. Instead, while the scandals pile up, the taxpayers are being left with the bill. It seems that the culture of this government is scandal, waste and mismanagement. It's their legacy to the people in the province of Ontario.

Speaker, Ontario families know that they cannot trust this Liberal government to get to the bottom of this scandal, and with such an overwhelming amount of political interference by the McGuinty-Wynne Liberals, it has become increasingly clear that the only way to get to the bottom of the Mississauga and Oakville gas plant scandals is to have a judicial inquiry.

In most jobs, there is a three-strike rule. If you mess up more than three times, you're let go. eHealth, Ornge

and gas plants: that is three strikes, and I'm not even going back more than the last couple of years. There are many, many more tales of scandal and waste, but if I were to go into detail about the failures of this government, we would be here all day.

Further to my point regarding the recent throne speech, Premier Wynne's speech has outlined her unwillingness to make the necessary and urgent decisions needed to fix the Liberals' made-in-Ontario jobs-and-debt crisis. When the new Premier says she wants to build on Mr. McGuinty's legacy, I question how she could fail to recognize the amount of scandal that the McGuinty legacy is built upon. Indeed, the McGuinty-Wynne legacy is a tale of injustice and mismanagement that has cost Ontario taxpayers billions and billions of dollars.

Premier Wynne's first act was to increase cabinet by 22%, Speaker, adding \$3 million more to our debt, just by her very first decision as Premier. That follows deliberate choices to hand the chequebook over to union bosses at the expense of students and parents, continue the expensive Feed-In Tariff program, and park the Drummond commission's 362 recommendations permanently on the shelf.

In the throne speech, we saw no new initiatives to reduce the size and cost of government. Instead of restraint, we continue to have a government spending more and more money, doubling our debt, of course, over the past nine years while taxpayers are getting less. Over the past decade, Ontario has lost 300,000 good jobs in the manufacturing sector, but at the same time we saw 300,000 more jobs and more people added to an already-bloated government payroll. Last month alone, in January 2013, we lost 48,000 private sector jobs right here in the province of Ontario. That's the greatest number of job losses since the recession. Again, in January we added an additional 9,000 positions in the public sector.

The size and cost of government under the Liberals continue to expand. Fewer people are working outside the government, paying for more people working inside the government, with higher wages, benefits and pensions than those who are paying the taxes. We have all seen reports from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business indicating public sector workers earn 27% more in wages, pensions and benefits than their counterparts in the private sector.

Speaker, ignoring the issues Ontario is facing is not a solution. We are facing the biggest jobs-and-debt crisis in our lifetime. Anyone who has ever been faced with a crisis or emergency will tell you that being cautious, being incremental will not save you. The only way forward is to move confidently and boldly in the direction that you know is right.

Premier Wynne indicated that she expanded her cabinet so that she would have the "tools needed to deal with the problems Ontario is facing." Based on the 22% growth overnight, I would anticipate that she is expecting Ontario's problems to only get worse. She has more than enough people in her cabinet to address the issues

Ontario is facing. I guess she's expecting a disaster. But I have news—and our caucus has been talking with conviction about this: The disaster can be avoided.

Ontario needs a new approach, one that will create jobs and stop reckless overspending. It's clear that the current government is not up to the challenge of doing this. Speaker, we are one week into this government and we have seen nothing but the same old results. You would swear that Premier McGuinty and his political handlers had never left the building. To change the direction of our province, we need to change the team leading it. The Ontario PC Party and opposition leader Tim Hudak are the only party with a comprehensive plan to end overspending and grow our economy.

This week was a moment of truth for this province. Four months after the Liberal government shut down the Legislature and walked off the job, this Premier had an opportunity to change course and move Ontario onto the right path, but, regrettably for this province and for its people, Premier Kathleen Wynne and her government chose to further entrench the Dalton McGuinty legacy. If the McGuinty-Wynne Liberals won't make the necessary decisions to get Ontario back on its feet, there's another party and another leader who will.

I am proud to say that your Ontario PC team and I, and our leader, have put forward a plan to rein in overspending, get our economic fundamentals right and grow the economy through our 11 Paths to Prosperity white papers: bold ideas to create a leaner public service that delivers more value for less money; to lower taxes on businesses so they can invest and create jobs right here in Ontario; to reduce the heavy hand of the 300,000 regulations that stand between businesses and success; to fix the outdated labour laws that have made us uncompetitive and are costing us jobs; and to create more affordable energy for Ontario families by treating energy as an economic fundamental rather than as a social experiment.

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Speaker, we can no longer be content by being first in debt and last in job creation. Ontario will rise again and reach its true potential, but only if we change the team that's leading Ontario. Our party is committed to working hard for Ontario families, and that is why we are offering real solutions to the disaster that this Liberal Party got us into.

There has been no change and no renewal. While the politically easy thing to do may have been to let the throne speech pass, as those in the third party have chosen to do, we have a responsibility to demand a plan that brings about a major change in the direction Ontario is headed. We need a new approach, and it starts with having only as much government as we can afford. For this reason, I will be opposing the throne speech and I encourage my colleagues to join me in doing this.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Kitchener-Conestoga.

Mr. Michael Harris: Thank you, Speaker. Last week, the Premier was presented with an opportunity to change

course, an opportunity to unveil a credible plan in the throne speech that would reduce the size and cost of government and finally get Ontario's economy back on track. But we all know what happened: The Premier refused to embrace this opportunity. Instead, she chose to entrench the failed agenda of Dalton McGuinty by keeping Ontario on its collision course with a \$30-billion deficit.

Over the last week in my riding of Kitchener-Conestoga, I've had many constituents ask me why the Liberals won't take Ontario's fiscal problems seriously. They just can't believe how the government can justify doing nothing at a time when the province is spending more than \$10 billion a year on interest payments for Ontario's \$275-billion debt.

I know many of my constituents would like to see some of that money go toward correcting the health care funding inequity in my riding. For years, Waterloo region has received considerably less provincial funding for local hospital services when compared with other jurisdictions. In fact, the region receives \$255 less per resident in provincial funding than the rest of Ontario. So how can the Liberals defend sitting on their hands while spending \$10 billion a year on interest when these types of gross inequities exist? Do you know what \$10 billion could be used for? How about 5,000 MRI machines or hiring 50,000 doctors. With funding shortfalls like the one I've mentioned, I think it's clear that the government can no longer continue business as usual.

We need to chart a new course, one that takes us away from more debt, more spending and more taxes. To do this, we must focus on the province's resources, on real priorities like jobs, the economy, education and world-class health care. But to move forward, we must first get our fiscal house in order. If we don't, and interest rates rise, we could face hundreds of millions of dollars in new interest payment expenses.

Even a former parliamentarian admitted the interest on the province's debt is "a ticking time bomb." Speaker, do you want to know who said that? The former finance minister. I wish he was here today. And I think it's fair to say he knows that situation is much more serious than the governing Liberals will admit to. I wish he was here to hear that, in fact. I'm happy he's moving on. God bless him and good luck to him in that venture. But everyone I talk to understands that Ontario must deal with its debt spending problem.

Unfortunately, we know this issue is not on the Premier's priority list, however. Wynne telegraphed that on her very first day; she increased spending by adding five more ministers to her cabinet. Perhaps the Premier should have also appointed a minister of debt to oversee Ontario's interest payments. After all, they would have had the third-largest portfolio in the Wynne government. The Liberals' dramatically bigger cabinet demonstrates that the Premier remains committed to continuing in the same failed direction of her predecessor, who for a decade did nothing but grow the size of government through excessive public sector hiring and pay increases. As a result,

the Canadian Federation of Independent Business has found that public sector workers earn 27% more in wages, pension and benefits than their counterparts in the private sector for the very same job. That's certainly not affordable, but it's also not fair. Unfortunately, this is a story for too many Ontarians.

Over the past decade, the province has lost 300,000 good-paying jobs in the manufacturing sector that helped to strengthen middle-class communities in places like Hamilton, Windsor, London, and in my home of the Waterloo region.

In order to improve the conditions for economic growth, leaders in the private sector have repeatedly told the government for years to lower business taxes, make energy more affordable and invest in infrastructure. What did the Liberals do? They did the opposite. They reneged on their promised tax cuts; they caused the price of hydro to skyrocket with their failed green energy social experiment. They failed to adequately invest in our roads, bridges and public facilities, leaving municipalities with a \$60-billion infrastructure deficit.

We've seen this story too many times before. The Liberals remain incapable of confronting the challenges we face with real leadership. On virtually every issue, their only solution is more spending, more red tape and more bureaucracy.

Take public sector hiring: When the private sector lost 300,000 manufacturing jobs, the Liberals' only solution was to add 300,000 public sector jobs to an already bloated and unaffordable government payroll. We have nearly 600,000 men and women in this province who wake up each and every morning without a job to go to. Last month alone, we lost 48,000 private sector jobs. That represents the greatest number of job losses since the recession.

You would think that with an unsustainable deficit and steadily increasing debt, the Liberal government would refrain from more public sector hiring in January, but you'd be wrong. The Liberals continued to add more to the government payroll by creating 9,000 more jobs in the public sector. This disturbing trend means that we have fewer people working in the private sector to pay for more and more folks working in the government. This is totally unsustainable.

Ontarians know that we can do better, but they also understand that we need bold leadership to get our province out of this mess. Anyone who has ever faced a crisis or an emergency knows that slowly taking small steps isn't going to save you. You have to do the opposite. You have to move quickly in the direction you know is right. That starts with developing a comprehensive plan, which I'm proud to say the PC Party has put forward.

We have presented a positive vision to make Ontario a leader in Canada again. That starts with getting government out of areas it has no business being in so that we can focus on things that really matter, like job creation. Part of that includes acknowledging that Ontario must invest in education to develop a knowledge economy while maintaining our manufacturing base.

To carry out this plan, Ontarians need a government they can trust, a government that's accountable and transparent. Unfortunately, the Liberal government broke that trust with its politically motivated decision to cancel the Mississauga and Oakville gas plants just to save a few Liberal seats in the last election.

This is political opportunism at its absolute worst. The Liberals continually obstruct this House from obtaining information detailing the true costs of the Liberals' gas plant scandal. It wasn't until the government faced contempt charges that we finally received the first batch of incomplete, redacted and whited-out documents. Even though there were no documents from the Premier or energy minister's office, the member for Kitchener Centre claimed the government had released all requested information. Then, just a month later, he was forced to retract those statements when the Liberals released a second batch of documents—again, incomplete, redacted and whited out. Now, just last week, we received a third batch, and the government has been forced to admit yet again that it has not been forthright with Ontarians.

Ontarians expect much more from the government. They expect a government that makes decisions, that is open and transparent. That's why we would appoint a judicial inquiry to investigate this matter. We need to determine who was involved in this politically motivated decision, how much money was wasted and how we can ensure that this type of blatant misuse of taxpayers' money, and the public's trust, never happens again.

This secrecy surrounding the issue really fits into a larger government strategy to keep Ontarians in the dark. Take cap-and-trade, for instance. Every time I have raised this issue in the House or in committee, the Liberals simply pretended it doesn't exist. Instead of being upfront with Ontarians about an excessive new cost associated with such a plan, they posted a vague discussion paper on the environmental registry which calls for a system with hard caps, while continuing to deny they're moving forward. And though cap-and-trade is a major part of the Liberals' policy agenda, it appeared nowhere in the throne speech.

For the record, Ontarians are aware that the Liberal government is forging ahead with an onerous new cap-and-trade scheme, one that provides no flexibility for Ontario businesses already struggling to remain competitive in the global marketplace. Forcing Ontario companies to make unrealistic cuts in greenhouse gases will only send emissions overseas to countries with less stringent environmental standards, all while crippling the industries that thousands of Ontarians who rely on those good-paying jobs. There's no shortage of solutions to combat climate change, such as conserving energy, investing in public transit and preserving green space in both urban and rural areas.

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Unfortunately, the Liberals have taken a page from their tax-and-spend playbook and are moving ahead with a restrictive new cap-and-trade scheme at a time when our economy can least afford it. We all know that carbon

taxation has been a pet project of the Liberals for years, yet they continue to hide this policy from Ontarians. When a government only uses its throne speech for a PR stunt, and not to indicate the major policies it intends to implement, it's no wonder Ontarians have lost faith in this Liberal government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? The member for Essex.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm pleased to join in on this session of debate on the throne speech. There's reference to the 362 recommendations made by Don Drummond. One of those, I think I remember correctly—the leader of the Conservative Party had indicated to the government that they had to implement each and every one of them or none of them would work. All 362 had to be implemented. One of those implementations—

Interjection.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I do. Your leader was standing outside of my office; we're on the same floor, the third floor. I actually watched the media scrum. He was pressed on it because one of those recommendations is the elimination of the Slots At Racetracks Program. You can't be selective. You're either saying remove them—use the 362 recommendations or don't. So you guys have to be clear on which recommendations—either you want all of them or you don't want any of them. Stop referencing them.

But you can hear the tone from the Tories that there is a concerted push toward an election, and I would say that it isn't necessarily the members who are doing it; it's the Tory party bosses, the brass, who are pushing toward an election. Because you see the polls, you see that there's been stagnation for your party, particularly your leader—and there's some good talent there. I hear it. There's some good talent. People could easily move up to the front, and I think that's what's happening, but it isn't in the best interests of the province and the people of the province. It might be in the best interests of your political futures, given the prospects of a new leader some time in the future, but it certainly isn't what people expect us to do. They expect us to push forward good ideas so that we can work toward the issues, not simply play partisan politics for the sake of political posturing and our own personal advancement or of the party. I would trust and hope that that is the intent of all the members in here, to put their best ideas forward and work towards them.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? The member for Ottawa—Orléans.

Mr. Phil McNeely: I'm pleased to respond to the debate on the throne speech motion.

I want to tell you that last Friday, when Premier Wynne came to Ottawa—the first week of the new session and three days after the throne speech—part of that day was taken up with a great round table on youth job creation and job creation in general. We were hosted by Mayor Watson and his team, Mr. Lazenby and Mr. Westeinde, directing the jobs agenda. We heard from Premier Wynne, but the major part of the presentations were from small, medium and large employers.

Within the week, Premier Wynne was doing the listening part in preparation for the job strategy for youth and jobs in particular. This was the second meeting on jobs; there was one held earlier in Toronto. So that is moving forward very quickly. That was in the speech from the throne and that is one of the large priorities for this government. We will continue to move with the good plans set forth through the speech from the throne.

I heard the third party sounding very open and very positive about some of the initiatives, but the opposition sounded like the old style of really letting the nurses go, closing the hospitals, letting the teachers go, decreasing the size of the people that provide the services in Ontario. That to me is not a good direction.

And you know the OSSTF have already encouraged their teachers to bring back the extracurricular work they have done so well. So congratulations to the Premier and the Minister of Education for acting on these two main items in the throne speech, and thank you to the teachers.

The speech from the throne has set a tough challenge for our government and this Legislature. I'm pleased, as the new PA to Minister Bradley, to see that the Great Lakes legislation is coming forward.

I believe that Premier Wynne has challenged the province through the throne speech and the throne speech's ideas will be further developed in the upcoming budget.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. John O'Toole: I'd like to commend my colleagues from Lambton—Kent—Middlesex as well as Kitchener—Conestoga on their remarks on the failed throne speech that was delivered here last week.

All of the media, pretty well, has made it very clear that the only thing remaining is a call on the McGuinty government, now the Kathleen Wynne government, to be open and transparent, specifically on the gas plant issue, in terms of who knew what when. The suggestion today was clear, and I think my colleagues have said that: that the people of Ontario have lost trust with the Kathleen Wynne government, after less than a week, basically. It'll be a week tomorrow since her first remarks in the House, where they've already lost trust with the people.

Our leader, Tim Hudak, has been calling for many of the things that are required. The tough decisions that he's been laying on the table have, for the most part, been ignored.

I can only say this: If you look at the remarks in the throne speech, it was more of the same. If you look at question period, it's pretty much a pickup from what happened with the un-openness and fairness around the gas plant. Even last week, Thursday, the bombshell dropped of more redacted papers that were hidden under the code name Vapour.

What more is to come? All of the mistakes—we haven't heard the end of Ornge. They haven't got a solution for the slots at racetracks. They haven't got any solution to the gas plants—how much it is actually going to cost. All of the information we requested is being

somewhat withheld—I don't know how; the contempt order is still on the paper.

I commend the members from Lambton—Kent—Middlesex and Kitchener—Conestoga for holding Kathleen Wynne's feet to the fire.

Try to be open and honest with the people of Ontario. That's all we're asking for.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I appreciate the opportunity to address the matter. I want to thank the members from Lambton—Kent—Middlesex and Kitchener—Conestoga for adding to the debate this afternoon.

I take a different tack. I want to say to the Liberal government that it's a very nice thing to have a speech from the throne, to talk about what needs to be done in Ontario. Some of the language that was used was of interest to us, although, as you're well aware, Speaker, our leader, Andrea Horwath, has said, "There were some nice words there. What we need to see is some very concrete action."

If, in fact, many of the concerns of the people of Ontario are going to be addressed; if, in fact, we are going to ensure that our schools function well and that our society is productive, then we need to ensure that we have public funding to actually carry out the work that's necessary. One of the things that we in the NDP have called for is to ensure that the HST phase-in does not go another step and give a \$1-billion-plus windfall to the corporate sector.

I had the opportunity previously, Speaker, to sit on the finance committee here in the Legislature. I saw many presentations in the lead-up to the 2011 budget—very clear that corporate tax cuts over the last decade in fact had undermined the ability of government to do what it had to do and, at the same time, didn't produce jobs. The more taxes were cut, the fewer jobs there were.

If this government actually wants to deliver on promises and have a budget that's successful, they have to ensure that the funds are coming in. They have to give up on this loophole for the HST for the corporate sector.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Kitchener—Conestoga has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Michael Harris: I'd like to thank the members for contributing to this debate: those from Essex, Ottawa—Orléans, my colleague from Durham and, finally, the member for Toronto—Danforth.

I spoke to a lot of constituents back in my riding of Kitchener—Conestoga—I had really hoped and looked for the new Premier—and I was just reading a column on their characterization of the throne speech: "Wynne's Speech a Load of Bull." That was them, not me. It talked about this new government. I was looking for this supposed new government to really take a 180-degree turn from where we were over the last eight, nine years, with this failed McGuinty approach and putting Ontario, in the place of Canada, where we are at now. I mean, we have got a \$12-billion deficit; \$10 billion annually to service the debt, which is now \$275 billion. We talk

about the priorities outlined in the throne speech, but we are simply not going to have the resources and the funds to be able to properly fund those social programs like health care, education etc.

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We talk about this new government and an accountable, transparent—making sure that everything is open for Ontarians. But yet we saw the latest attempt just mere days after we got back into the House after prorogation. The government pulls the same old tricks that they've done in the first session: dumping new documents, saying, "Listen, we have got everything here. They're all here. Oops, no, we found some more documents." Ontarians will not trust their government if it continues to treat its citizens the way it has.

I appreciate the opportunity to address the throne speech on behalf of my constituents and thank you for your time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: First, I'd like to take this opportunity to congratulate the newly appointed Premier of the Liberal government.

The Premier delivered her throne speech on February 19, and there were a litany of promises to Ontarians. Unfortunately, those promises lacked detail on how this government would deliver real results for Ontario families.

Speaker, Ontario families in every city in Ontario are feeling the pinch of these economic times that we are facing in the province. In big cities, small towns and in rural Ontario, families are telling us that they are experiencing tough times. Families expected that this government would be proactive in bringing in legislation that would create jobs, improve the quality of life through better-managed health care and help families make life more affordable. The government has been promising much and delivering very little. Unless this government starts to show real action in the upcoming budget on job creation, on health care and on managing the books in this province, New Democrats will not be supporting this government's budget.

This government's throne speech lacked detail, was vague and had no real plans for job creation for our youth, to stop corporate tax loopholes and to deal with rising auto insurance premiums. We saw this government make promises to co-operate on some proposals New Democrats put forward, but on other issues, we saw this government remain silent or reject proposals outright.

Ontario needs real leadership, and Ontarians need action in areas like improving health care, job creation, balancing the budget and making life more affordable for families in big cities, small cities and rural Ontario. In this session, New Democrats will focus on moving forward with positive change for Ontarians, and we will expect results from this minority Parliament. Our leader, Andrea Horwath, has set out good ideas to accomplish getting results for Ontarians.

New Democrats have proposed to the government to close corporate tax loopholes. We want this government

to move forward on some corporate tax compliance recommendations that were in the Drummond report that we would expect this government to implement. We would expect this government to make changes to the employer health tax exemption threshold and close this tax loophole so that large, multi-billion dollar corporations do not qualify for exemptions that were designed for small businesses. But this Liberal government has refused to say whether they will continue to allow large corporations to use these exemptions, and this government is still allowing corporations to write off \$1.3 billion in entertainment and meals.

Our leader, Andrea Horwath, has been very clear on proposals for closing the corporate tax loopholes and asked this new Premier to work with the NDP. Speaker, this proposal is a reasonable approach. In 2009, the Ontario government announced that companies would receive input tax credits for sales on their purchases, but they also announced temporary restrictions on some input tax credits that would apply to large businesses and financial institutions for items like meals, entertainment, telecommunications and company vehicles. Speaker, these restrictions are set to end in 2015. What we think is reasonable is to keep the restrictions permanent on large corporations and banks so they will not be able to claim sales rebates for corporate meals and entertainment expenses. It doesn't make sense that we're talking about cuts to health care but allowing companies to write off Leafs tickets in this economy.

Speaker, we also suggest that small businesses would continue to receive the input tax credits for all purchases, including fuel and energy, because we know that small businesses create jobs in our communities and that having healthy small businesses means a healthy community. Local residents support their neighbourhood small businesses, and so should this government. If this government listens to New Democrats, this decision would save the treasury—get ready—\$1.3 billion annually in Ontario.

I remind this government that they commissioned the Drummond report, and although we did not agree with a great deal of the report, there were other recommendations we believe are reasonable; that was the recommendation to reduce the ability of corporations to eliminate or decrease payment of provincial corporate income tax by shifting profits and losses across Canada, along with other illegitimate practices that could be diminished, including aggressive international tax planning strategies used to shift profits earned in Ontario to foreign-based subsidiaries to avoid Ontario corporate income tax. The report estimates this would bring in \$50 million in one year and \$200 million by 2017-18.

There are other ways to help small business. What New Democrats propose to assist small business is to continue the practice of not collecting the employer health tax on the first \$400,000 of payroll, but with some changes. Today, this exemption currently applies to all businesses, but if Ontario put this in place only for small business owners and removed the exemption for

companies with payrolls over \$5 million, which is about 100 employees, that would be an estimated \$90 million for the treasury.

Ontarians understand fairness and expect us all to pay our fair share. In a time of record profits for some of our largest corporations, this is a responsible thing to do.

Speaker, Ontarians have been waiting for MPPs to get back to work in the Legislature and get back to business.

It's no surprise to many that London's unemployment rate is one of the highest in Ontario and people are having a hard time finding a job.

In 2012, there were 182,000 unemployed Ontarians between the ages of 16 and 24. That works out to a 15.7% unemployment rate—nearly double that of an average worker in this province. This is a lot of young people. To make things worse, almost 25% of all youth with a university degree were unable to find work in their field. That is not the way parents want to see their children start their future: graduating university and carrying a substantial debt load, yet unable to find work in their field of study. Our youth need to have the prospect of a bright future, and that means getting a job so they can purchase their first car, buy a home and start a family, and not in that order—feel free as to how you want to do that order.

We have said that New Democrats believe that rewarding companies when they create a job is the way to stimulate our economy. That's why we put forward a jobs creation plan called First Start. This plan looks to help to provide young people aged 16 to 26 years an entry point into long-term employment. This will have participants learn life and work skills while earning income.

So if this government is committed to creating jobs, we ask them to help to put young people back to work instead of handing tax breaks to companies that want to shift taxes out of the province or write off sales tax for dinners and Leafs tickets. This is an achievable plan that would help Ontario youth and reward businesses for creating jobs.

Another way to help Ontarians is opening the doors for employment. People on social assistance face many barriers to obtaining a job, and currently social assistance rules punish the initiative by those going out to look for work by taking away 50% of people's earnings, starting from the first dollar of wages. What we need to do, Speaker, is encourage people on OW and ODSP to seek out opportunities to look for work and become independent, and not penalize them for finding a job and wanting to make a better life for themselves.

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That is why New Democrats have a plan to open the doors to employment, and would allow social assistance recipients to receive 100% of the first \$200 they earn each month. This proposal comes out of the Lankin-Sheikh social assistance review report. A change to this rule would make a difference to approximately 50,000 Ontarians.

Ontarians want to see their public tax dollars put toward investment that actually creates jobs and grows

the economy. They don't want to see corporations write off sports and entertainment expenses. That's why it makes more sense to help youth and those on social assistance find and keep good jobs.

Ontario families are trying to make ends meet, and they're struggling to pay everyday bills. Having the HST on home heating doesn't help make life more affordable for families. Ontarians are asking us to help them make their lives more affordable and give them a break.

We know that Ontarians are among the safest drivers in Canada, but they're paying the highest auto insurance premiums in the country. That's why we, the New Democrats, are calling for solutions; we're calling for more affordable auto insurance. The government should direct auto insurance rates for safe drivers to drop by 15% at the end of 2013 so that they are paying a fair insurance premium. A 15% premium reduction for safe drivers would save the average Ontario safe driver \$226 per year. In 2011, the Auditor General noted in his report, "Although Ontario has one of the lowest per capita rates of automobile-accident deaths and injuries in the country, it also has the highest ... premium[s] in Canada...."

As accident rates have decreased, average payouts have also decreased, yet insurance premiums in Ontario have increased consistently. Ontarians should be benefiting from safer driving, but instead we're all paying more. The Financial Services Commission of Ontario can instruct insurers to lower their premiums. By asking FSCO to decrease premiums by 15% at the end of 2013, we can ensure that life is more affordable for safe drivers in Ontario.

Some of those things, as I mentioned, are balanced approaches, helping Ontario find and create jobs and also make life more affordable.

Health care is always on the mind of every Ontarian, I think, and it's one of the pillars of public service. All Canadians hold it in high regard, and the people of Ontario want to have their health care there when they need to use it. Health care is something we all will use at some point in our lives.

By the year 2017, for the first time, Ontario will be home to more people over 65 than children under 15. The senior population is living longer, and seniors are telling us they want to live in the comfort of their home as long as possible. Study after study has shown that staying in your home longer isn't only good for seniors and quality of life, but also helps stretch our precious health care dollars further. It's a win-win proposition, Senior—Speaker. I don't know if you're a senior yet, Speaker.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Not quite.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: If we help seniors live longer in their homes, we know that will mean seniors need to depend on home care services. So it's important to have these services delivered to seniors, to avoid unnecessary visits back to the hospital. We don't want that revolving door, Senior—Speaker—for seniors. I'm going to call you "Senior."

In the throne speech, it's good to hear this government's willingness to get seniors the care they need, but

as I mentioned before, we need to put meat on those bones; in other words, details on this government's home care plan.

There are 6,100 Ontario seniors waiting for home care, and some are waiting for as long as eight months, Speaker—eight months. This makes life unpredictable for seniors and their families, because we know that families also look after their elderly parents. Families more often than not are the primary caregivers of their elderly relatives, and they need help to deliver those services. Families and seniors need to have predictability when their loved ones are released from the hospital, and the home care should be reliable and consistent. Speaker, that's why New Democrats again have proposed a practical solution: a five-day home care guarantee that would ensure that Ontarians receive care five days after being released from the hospital and approved for the care.

The cost of a five-day home care guarantee would be \$30 million. We have a way to pay for that, because this is a type of investment that's positive and that we can afford through identifying savings. According to the government's own report, we can save \$27 million by standardizing health care procurement and streamlining CCACs and the LHINs. If the NDP's plan to cap hospital CEO salaries is included and is part of the solution, we can find additional savings that take that number north of \$30 million.

You see, Speaker, that's a balanced approach and that's what people want to see. They want to see their seniors stay at home and they want to see how we're going to pay for that. We're offering those balanced approaches and reasonable solutions. New Democrats are, as I mentioned, taking a balanced approach to balancing the books.

In addition to our solutions, we are calling for a spending review to search for savings that don't impact services that families rely on. We understand that all of us need to do our part in these tough times, so imagine our surprise when senior government managers received bonuses worth \$21 million just prior to the holidays.

Additionally, balancing the books should not mean that we sell off essential revenue generators like the LCBO or ServiceOntario. These plans are the same as the 407 debacle that cost the province billions of much-needed revenue, money that not only helps to fund important services but ensures that citizens get some tax relief. Selling off the LCBO and ServiceOntario is not how we're going to help pay for health care, our infrastructure and our education system.

This government needs to be accountable and transparent. They have spent Ontario's hard-earned tax dollars on fiascos and scandals and have wasted public tax dollars, like on Ornge, eHealth and gas plants. The people of this province deserve answers from the Premier and her caucus.

The people of Ontario elected a minority government and have waited long enough for MPPs to return back to work and to this Legislature. New Democrats are going to work hard to get results, create jobs, improve health

care and make life more affordable while taking a balanced approach to balancing the books. Speaker, I for one am glad we're back in this Legislature, because it's long overdue. Ontario has been sitting, waiting for this Liberal government to pick their leader so we could come back to work and actually get results for Ontarians. I urge this government to please listen to some of our proposals so when your budget comes forward, we can actually see results and help the people of Ontario accomplish what they're looking for.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Hon. Reza Moridi: It's a pleasure to rise in this House and to speak to the speech from the throne motion. The speech from the throne is a high-level document, and as we all know, it's delivered by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario. It contains, basically, our party's values, the Liberal values. As my colleagues from all three parties have noticed, the speech from the throne refers to the Liberal values, meaning being socially fair and economically being responsible.

The speech from the throne discussed—just one line; not very much conversation on that has been done in this House, but it's a very important point which is in the speech from the throne. It's about expansion of our business and our trade with emerging small economies around the world. As we all know, in the past 10 or 15 years, we have been trying to expand our business with major emerging economies such as China, India and Brazil. But not much attention has been paid to expanding our trade and business with smaller emerging countries, such as Malaysia and Indonesia in Asia, for instance; or central Asian countries such as Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan; or Middle Eastern countries such as Arabian countries, Gulf countries and Turkey; and then South American countries—for example, Argentina or Colombia; and eastern European countries. We need to expand our business, our trade, with all these emerging countries in order to expand our trade with various countries around the world. We are heavily dependent upon our business with our neighbour to the south and, to a certain extent, with those three major, emerging economies.

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This is one of the major points which we can see in the speech from the throne. We hope that in the future our trade relationship will be expanded with every country, all countries around the world, in particular those small, emerging countries in the world.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further comment? The member for Haldimand–Norfolk.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Thank you, Speaker. Yes, I do have some comments to direct to the presentation from the member from London–Fanshawe. Mention was made of permitting those on social assistance to keep more of the money that they earn—those who are able to work. That's an excellent idea. As the member may know, we introduced that idea in legislation, I think it could be close to three years ago, through a private member's bill,

and it did receive support from all three parties, was referred to the finance committee, and there it sat. This government would not call it forward for hearings.

Subsequent to that we went through an election; we included that idea in our election platform. I can't remember whether the Liberals or the NDP did include that idea in their election platforms, but I am quite heartened to hear both parties muse about this idea now, albeit three years later. It is unfortunate that, as a result of this inaction, so many people have spent the last three years on social assistance, on welfare, on the Ontario disability program—those who were working—and were not permitted by this Legislature to retain some of those earnings.

So I would sincerely hope this government will bring forward legislation to that effect. They can lift it right out of that legislation of three years ago, proposed by the opposition. I'd also like this government to bring forward legislation that consolidates Ontario Works and disability into one program at the local level.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I just want to congratulate the member from London–Fanshawe in presenting a very reasonable speech. I'm looking forward to the Liberal members commenting on the proposals that we are making, because this is going to be a showdown, as you might imagine, for the budget, so we'd like some of you to speak to it.

I find the suggestions that have been made by the member, and are being made by us as a party, reasonable, practical and doable, except none of the Liberal members that I'm hearing are speaking to any of the suggestions that have been made.

One of the suggestions is that we need to reduce auto insurance rates for people who, in our view, are overpaying. When insurance companies make \$2-billion profits in cutting the benefits of all Ontarians, you would think that it would be reasonable for the insurance companies to give some of that money back to people. I think that in the time of an economy where people are suffering, they could use a little break. So New Democrats are saying, as the member of London–Fanshawe has said, that that would be something practical and something doable, and we think many Liberals, MPPs and supporters would support that initiative.

Closing some of the tax loopholes: People get the impression, for some reason, by suggesting that what we are saying is anti-business—no. Businesses are on the whole doing well, particularly the large ones, particularly the shareholders, and all we're saying to them is, "Pay some of that money back." We're urging the Liberals to close some of the loopholes so that those who don't have the loopholes could benefit a little.

This is a practical proposal made by our member. We're hoping some of the Liberals will respond to it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: It's a pleasure to rise in the Legislature today and speak in response to the highlights

that the member from London—Fanshawe has given in response to the speech from the throne, which was called The Way Forward, delivered by the Honourable David Onley on February 19, 2013.

Speaker, highlights for me in the speech from the throne are that we would continue, as a government, to be strong economic stewards, to help create jobs and grow the economy, to be fiscally responsible, to eliminate the deficit by 2017-18 and continue to build the best education and health care systems in the world, as we have done since 2003. I can tell you that these are the initiatives that my constituents in Etobicoke—Lakeshore, constituents I've been privileged to represent since 2003, want us to focus our attention on.

I was reminded of the wonderful community that I represent just this past weekend. I can tell you that we had, with my colleague from Etobicoke Centre, our eighth annual government and community services fair gathering at Cloverdale Mall, where we have hundreds of organizations and thousands of people come forward and we have an opportunity to reconnect with our communities. We have our government ministries here at the provincial level, we have municipal service providers such as those from the city of Toronto—parks and rec, public libraries—and then we have local organizations that make our communities amazing places to raise our families and to grow old in and be young in and to continue to represent. Some of those organizations are the Franklin Horner Community Centre, the LAMP community centre, Trillium Health Partners, Windfall, Furniture Bank, Dorothy Ley Hospice, our historic societies, our Etobicoke Humane Society and the Etobicoke Rotary. I wish I could name them all.

I will take the remaining seconds to say that it is a privilege to represent this community, and to thank those organizations for everything they do for our community.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments. We return to the member for London—Fanshawe for her response.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: It's interesting—you know, we've come back to the House. I got elected back in October 2011, and when we were here, we started learning how things work and how you're supposed to co-operate with each other, and we had an effort in that session that we were trying to make this minority government work. But I think this government across the way keeps forgetting it is a minority government. The focus in their questions and comments was about the Liberal government. If they want the opposition to work with them, they've got to, as one of my colleagues said, reach out to us. We're reaching out to you, and we're giving you suggestions, and we're asking you to listen. When you hear those responses about what they've done in their riding and how rosy and sunshine and apple pie it is out there, that's great—but when we're talking about the solutions so that we can find ways to help Ontarians with job creation and health care and affordability, that completely was right over their head.

So I'd like to say that I'm a little disappointed that this government wouldn't actually have some feedback on the comments that we're giving and suggestions that we're giving that are going to get results for Ontarians. That's what this session is about. Let's get results. Let's get people back to work. Let's find health care. Let's find solutions to help people get good health care and make life more affordable. That's what Ontarians are asking us for, and that's what I'm here to do. I'm not here to gloss over the questions and comments from someone else. I think that direct questions and comments is a good interchange between members, and that's how we're going to find solutions to get to where we need to go.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate.

Hon. John Milloy: It's a pleasure for me to address this debate. As people may know, as government House leader I have an opportunity to speak in this Legislature quite regularly, but it's often on technical matters; it's often in a question period venue. I welcomed the opportunity, when it was offered to me, to speak about the speech from the throne and the new government, not only because I'm excited about the speech from the throne—I'm excited about the vision that has been put forward for the new government—but it also allows me to give a bit of an update to this Legislature about the great things that are going on in my riding of Kitchener Centre.

I want to begin, as others on all sides of the Legislature have, by congratulating our new Premier, Premier Wynne, someone whom I've had the privilege of working closely with over the past number of years. I also want to say how honoured I am that she has asked me to remain in her cabinet as the government House leader, a job that comes with certain challenges in a minority situation but one that I have enjoyed over the last year and will certainly enjoy as we move forward.

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The speech from the throne, Mr. Speaker: It's a vision for Ontario and how we want to see it progress over the next several months. As I said at the beginning, I want to reflect a bit on what it means for my community and some of the great things that are going on in my community—how we from Kitchener Centre want to see the province move forward. As other members have commented, I've certainly had a great opportunity to spend time in the community, meeting with constituents, meeting with individuals and talking about what their priorities are.

Mr. Speaker, it's been a busy, busy time back in Kitchener Centre. Several weeks ago, just to put one plug on the record, I had the great privilege of announcing \$3.5 million in government support for an organization that I think you may be aware of and other members may be: KW Habilitation, which works with individuals with developmental disabilities. They have a facility there which has been serving the community of Waterloo region for many, many years. They do an outstanding job.

I've got to give a shout-out to Ann Bilodeau, their outstanding executive director, and her team. But quite

frankly, Mr. Speaker, they needed a new facility. They needed it for a variety of reasons to be able to offer the support and services that are needed. About two weeks ago on a Friday, I was able to go on behalf of the government at a wonderful, wonderful ceremony—hundreds of people were out for it—and announce that we would be moving forward with this support for this new facility.

I think it speaks about the type of agenda that this government has had over the past number of years, one that has made social justice and issues around, in this case, individuals with disabilities, a real priority, not only in supporting them but making sure that they can provide the type of input, the type of contribution to the community that is always welcome.

The speech from the throne, of course, was last week, and in between I had a very, very busy time. I can report in the House what people in my community are saying. Again, over the past number of days, the Friday leading into the weekend, there was a very, very exciting event—again, symbolic of the trajectory of this government—and that was the opening of the brand new courthouse in Waterloo region. It was my privilege in 2005 as a new MPP to announce the fact that this government was moving ahead with the courthouse. It is a beautiful facility—over 400,000 square feet, 30 courtrooms and, perhaps most importantly, on time and on budget.

On Saturday, I went and was able to make a Trillium announcement for a local organization: the Waterloo Regional Matmen Wrestling Club, which works with young people. They had individuals from across the province, young wrestlers and their parents and coaches. We were able to talk about some support through Trillium—I believe about \$43,000 that went through.

Later in the day, as we were approaching the end of the month, I did my last Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal to a very deserving citizen of our community by the name of Chandrika Anjaria. She works with the university, has been involved in the United Way and in a number of local Indian organizations, and really has made a tremendous, tremendous contribution to our community.

I want to talk a little bit about that ceremony. That ceremony actually sprung out of a situation that had arisen in the riding of Kitchener-Waterloo, my neighbouring riding, when my colleague the then MPP Elizabeth Witmer had put forward her list of names—and members will be aware of the list of names that each of us were asked to put forward for potential recipients of this medal. Elizabeth Witmer had put forward her list and then decided to retire from politics, and we faced the conundrum of who would give out the medals, how we would organize it. It reverted, technically, to the then Premier of the day, Premier McGuinty, and I was asked to coordinate it. Once the dust of the by-election had settled and we had gotten through it, I approached Mrs. Witmer, now working at workers' compensation, the WSIB, and I also approached the new MPP, the member from Kitchener-Waterloo, Ms. Fife, an NDP member, as we all know, and I said, "Why don't the three of us get

together and present these medals at one ceremony?" The one on Saturday was sort of a follow-up because Chandrika could not be there. But we had this wonderful evening where the three of us, each representing three different political parties, came together—there were several hundred people there—and presented medals to the original list that Mrs. Witmer had put forward. I want to dwell on that for a second or stress that because I want to come back to it a few seconds.

As I say, we had the Queen Elizabeth II medal presentation. Later in the evening, I went to a Chinese New Year celebration at the Central Ontario Chinese Cultural Centre—always a wonderful event, again with several hundred people there. By coincidence, their president, Mr. Shu Hing Man, is someone whom I presented a Queen Elizabeth medal to—an outstanding community member. On Sunday, Mr. Speaker, instead of a New Year's levee, I had a skating party, where, again, people from throughout the community came and skated for free at the memorial auditorium, home of the Kitchener Rangers, the greatest hockey team in the province.

What's interesting is that in all these travels, when I talked to people about what they are concerned about, they brought forward the obvious things about health care and education and the economy, but they also mentioned the courthouse. I must say, there has been a lot of buzz at home about it. But most of them, Mr. Speaker—it was quite interesting—made reference to what was going on in the Legislature and to their desire to see the parties work together.

I often wonder, when I pick up the paper in the morning—who reads the editorials? I read the editorials. Here, we all probably read the editorials. But there was an editorial in the Kitchener Record on Friday which was cited to me over and over again as I went about my duties throughout the weekend, and I'd like to share just parts of it with the Legislature. It's from Friday, February 22—and this is just to show you that people do read their editorials, and I'll just quote part of it. It says:

"The leader of Ontario's Progressive Conservatives probably felt tough when he announced Thursday that his party would vote against the upcoming provincial budget—even though it hasn't even been written yet. Maybe he imagined himself sitting in the Premier's seat when he declared he would fight for a provincial election to be held as soon as possible.

"Yet despite all the sound and fury, [the Leader of the Opposition] succeeded only in revealing his party's weakness in the minority Legislature—as well as his complete failure to comprehend how such a Legislature should work for the good of the province....

"A far better plan—for Ontario as well as [the Leader of the Opposition] and the Conservatives—would have been for him to join the budget-making process. He should have tried to influence a Liberal government that, in its throne speech this week, declared its priorities were 'fiscal responsibility, economic growth and increased employment.' Aren't those [the Leader of the Opposition's] goals, too?

"By withdrawing from the budget process before it has been completed, by declaring that no budget will be good enough to win Conservative approval, [the Leader of the Opposition] has elbowed his party to the sidelines, rendering it both impotent and irrelevant at a crucial time."

Mr. Speaker, I am not making it up. I heard from people who said to me, "Did you see that editorial in the paper? Why can the parties in the Legislature not work together? Why can they not sit down and make this work? We don't want an election." What was interesting—and again, Mr. Speaker, I'm not exaggerating. A number of people said to me, "Do you know what was great? You and Elizabeth Witmer and Catherine Fife actually got together and were able to give out Queen Elizabeth II medals. It was great to see parties working together."

When I think about the speech from the throne, when I think about particularly the latter section of it, the theme that comes forward there is about co-operation. It's about a Premier who wants to set a tone that is conciliatory, that has set a tone that—and certainly people are referencing the fact that I'm House leader. I will tell you, privately and publicly, when I spoke to the Premier to get my marching orders, what she said is, "Let's have a spirit of co-operation. Let's be reasonable. Let's sit down and make sure that this Legislature can work. Let's look at what good ideas are being offered by all sides of the House and have them reflected in the speech from the throne"—which I believe it was, and certainly is the goal as we move forward with the budget.

That is one of the overall themes of the speech from the throne that I was most proud of. But I want to pick a number of them—and again, reflecting some of the concerns in the community.

As someone who—what, 10 days ago?—up to 10 days ago, was Ontario's Minister of Community and Social Services, I had a first-hand opportunity to work with and meet with many in our community—the community of Kitchener Centre, the community of Waterloo region—who are concerned about issues of poverty.

1700

There was great excitement with the work that was undertaken by Frances Lankin and Munir Sheikh in the social assistance review. I had the privilege, as the minister of the day, of receiving the report, of being briefed by both individuals, of meeting with them and learning of the type of detailed recommendations that they were going to bring forward and that were put forward in the report.

I just want to remind members of the Legislature to take a step back to when that report came out. Those of you who have had a chance to read the report—and I recommend it to everyone—will realize that within it were three types of recommendations.

The first were a series of very, very good, solid recommendations. I was excited to see some of them referenced in the speech from the throne, and the member from Haldimand–Norfolk spoke about the issue of people on social assistance keeping more of their earnings.

The second category of recommendations was those where the authors of the report said, "Look, we don't know. We don't have a 100% idea of how you should move forward in a certain area. It needs more study. It needs more discussion. It needs more debate." I think that's certainly legitimate. We gave them a huge, huge undertaking in looking at a very complicated system, the social assistance system in this province.

The third type of category involved those areas where they came forward with recommendations where, quite frankly, there isn't a consensus; where there is debate and discussion that needs to be held; where there needs to be more consultation. It was interesting. Prior to the release of the report I had a chance to meet with many people in our community who are concerned about this issue. Following the release of the report I met with many people who are excited about the thrust, who are excited about the vision, but who want a chance to have that kind of discussion about how we move forward.

It was interesting. When the report came out and I spoke to many journalists, I outlined those three categories of reports, and I also said that we have to take a look at the fiscal realities of this province. What I think frustrated me the most is, the reporting that came forward said that the minister of the day—myself—we wouldn't implement the report because we didn't have the money. I never said that. What I said is that we need to study the report, we need to understand its complexities and we need to have that path forward. I was absolutely delighted when the new Premier came in and one of the first areas that she identified as a priority for her as Premier, and a priority for this government, involved this report and involved the steps that they talk about.

I've referenced the one that was highlighted in the speech from the throne concerning keeping more of your wages. As members are aware, those on social assistance, when they work, their social assistance rate is reduced by 50% to correspond with the wages they have, both as an incentive to have them go back into the workplace but also to level the playing field with those who are working and not on social assistance. What we're talking about is let's get the incentives a little bit better and have that threshold where individuals can earn up to a certain amount. That's something that is outlined in the report and, as I say, I'm delighted that, as a government, we've looked at.

Another piece of the report which the speech from the throne spoke about—at the beginning part of the speech, and separate from this—was the whole issue of persons with disabilities and making sure that they are welcomed into the labour force. I began my speech today referencing KW Habilitation and the outstanding work that they do with individuals with disabilities. I can think of countless organizations across this province that I've met as a minister, that I've met as an MPP—certainly, there are a number of others that operate locally—and all of them, over and over again, spoke about the desire of so many individuals with disabilities to enter the workforce.

The fact that we have people in the province of Ontario who have the skills, who have the talent, who

want to enter the workforce but are finding barriers, are finding that there's a lack of support there for them—this was an issue which I felt very strongly about as minister and I still feel very, very strongly about as an MPP, and continue to push on it. I've had the opportunity to meet and work with our Lieutenant Governor, the Honourable David C. Onley, and in fact went with him and a number of Ontario businesses to Connecticut to visit Walgreens. Walgreens is a world leader in terms of hiring persons with disabilities as part of their operation. The plant, I believe, has—around 40% of the employment force are persons with disabilities. They don't get any special pay or some sort of special programming. They are brought in as part of the workforce. What's amazing is that we talked to the senior executives with Walgreens and they said, "You know what's our most productive plant in the country? That particular one."

Mr. Speaker, you find when you speak to employers—and I think of the great work that's being done by Rotary right now, with the fact that polio, as a cause, thankfully, is diminishing. They are able to put more of their attention in other areas. One of them is this whole area of promoting the hiring of persons with disabilities.

When you talk to the business community, they say, "We're not doing this because it's good. Yes, we all recognize the fact we want to reach out, but we're doing it because it's great for the bottom line." Here is a group of individuals who represent a labour force that has not been tapped into, many of whom have the training and the skills, but you also find studies that have been done: lower absentee rates, higher productivity, individuals who want to work.

So our challenge as a government—and this is not a fiscal challenge. I mean, there is programming, there are dollars available, but our challenge as a government—and this reflects the report that I referenced, the Munir Sheikh-Frances Lankin report; it reflects the speech from the throne—is, how can we bring employers and persons with disabilities together?

I was excited. I was delighted to see that was a significant part of, as I say, the first part of the speech from the throne. Because what the speech from the throne does is it makes all the connections. Those connections are that, yes, we have a fiscal imperative and we've got to get our house in order, but we have pressures in health care. We have pressures on so many fronts, and everything is connected from one to the other. When we look at issues like social assistance—to marginalize people on social assistance, to not give them the support they need, is merely going to put pressure on other parts of the economy. It's going to put pressure on health care. It's going to put pressure on other services that people, as they are increasingly marginalized, need to go to.

I think the vision of the Premier is one that we should all applaud, and that's a vision that says we've got to realize everything is connected. Although we do have an economic imperative, at the same time we've got to look out for everyone, including the least fortunate, in order to make our society work and in order to make our economy work.

I was delighted to see that as another cornerstone: co-operation with the opposition, seeing the interconnectedness that exists between the various programs in our government and in our society, and at the same time, within the framework of fiscal responsibility. All of us on this side of the House were pleased with the former Minister of Finance's announcement that the deficit has come in below the target—that maximum that we had. We are making progress. But what we have to do is we have to get it right. We have to make sure, as we move forward, that we make the investments that are true investments, that are going to pay off; that we make the tough decisions and are going to get our fiscal house in order; and that we continue to build an Ontario for the future.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, I'm delighted with the new Premier. I'm delighted with her personal vision for the province. I'm delighted with the vision of the government that's put forward in the speech from the throne. It's one that reflects a great deal of co-operation and dialogue with the opposition. I am absolutely flabbergasted that we're not seeing that dialogue and discussion continue with the Conservative Party. But I think if we forge ahead with our agenda, my hope is that we're going to see that type of dialogue and co-operation so that we can see an Ontario that is in the best interests of everyone and reflects the needs of everyone, particularly those in the great community of Kitchener Centre. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Yes, thank you very much. Questions and comments? The member for—

Mr. Toby Barrett: Haldimand–Norfolk.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Haldimand–Norfolk.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Thanks, Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to respond to the comments from the government House leader. As we have heard, much of his comment related to his previous portfolio as Minister of Community and Social Services, making reference to the importance of better enabling people on social assistance to not only get a job, but to keep more of the money they make if they are working. We need these people; our economy needs these people. Certainly our party has a very concrete plan to create the kinds of jobs that will be available for people on social assistance, very specific recommendations with respect to tax policy, with respect to labour policy, with respect to energy policy, with respect to eliminating so much of the unnecessary bureaucracy and red tape that we have been exposed to under the present government.

1710

This is so important. We've got something like 500,000 people unemployed, we have 450,000 people on welfare, and a very significant number of people on the disability program—a program that is growing. We brought forward legislation three years ago to enable people on these programs to keep more of the money they make. It was not brought forward by this government to the finance committee. I don't think they put it in their party platform during the last election.

There has been a change, even though we do see a continuation of the McGuinty-Wynne legacy. There are some good ideas in the Lankin report and Drummond's recommendations. We have waited far too long to see this government take some action on some of these steps here.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Questions and comments?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I used my first two rounds to, I think, attack my Tory colleagues a little bit too much. I'm not going to do that anymore; don't worry. I'm going to point the sights at the government.

I'll tell you, I listened intently to the throne speech. I heard the word "agriculture" once—somebody can correct me; I think it was mentioned one time—not really in any specific terms: not in terms of acknowledging the important role that those in rural Ontario play in our overall economy, not acknowledging that this province could certainly use a provincial agriculture strategy or procurement policy when it comes to the use and procurement of Ontario-raised and Ontario-grown food within our various ministries and operations.

In terms of the throne speech, it certainly shied away when it came to the issues of what the government did with the Slots at Racetracks Program in absolutely dismantling and destroying that industry with one fell swoop, in pulling the rug out from underneath those who work in that important industry without any consultation, without any negotiation and really without any concerns as to the detriment it was going to play in rural Ontario. They give us a really clear example of how the government can act to destroy an industry. It is the way you would do it if you were looking to absolutely eliminate the competition, and that's what they're doing.

They are talking about modernizing Ontario Lottery and Gaming. What they're talking about, essentially, is privatizing the entire scope of the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp., and that makes up a large part of the policy of the PCs' platform—I told you I wasn't going to attack you, but I had to. They are symbiotic in policies there. They want to privatize, let Donald Trump come in and run every casino in the province of Ontario. That certainly is not a road to economic fortune; it is a gamble that I think Ontarians aren't ready to take, and I hope they change direction on it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Mr. Speaker, I'm glad to join in this debate and make a few comments on the speech by my colleague the government House leader and the great member for Kitchener-Centre. It's really interesting. He committed a lot of his speaking to the passion that he shows about the work he's doing in his riding and also some of the work that he's done at the Ministry of Community and Social Services.

I just want to add to it for some of the work that has gone on in my riding that is covered in the throne speech. Our government has been in office for the last nine years, and I've been a lucky person to represent my area for the

last seven. I have to say to you, when I got elected back in 2005, I represented a riding that was really challenged when it came to youth problems, employment problems, because the young people in my area were losing hope.

At the time, I had a very frank discussion with Premier Dalton McGuinty, and he sort of covered the pillars that this government intended to pursue over the years, which were health care, education, jobs and what we would call social justice.

In my riding at the time—a large population with very few services in the area—the first opportunity by the government was to create the Taibu Community Health Centre to deal with some of the health problems of our seniors and the young people in our area. That was a \$4-million commitment by this government. I'm proud to say that that centre has been built. It's open, and the community is using it every day.

At the time I got elected, the dropout rate in the high school in my area was pretty significant. It was one of the neighbourhoods designated by the city of Toronto and the United Way. I have to say that the Learning to Age 18 Act cleared up some of the problems for me.

We're in the right direction. The people are asking us to carry on.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Rob Leone: I listened intently to the government House leader, who is from a neighbouring riding. I'm pretty happy to report that he reads the news, so I'm going to actually read something that Rex Murphy wrote in his article this weekend, called "Ontario has a Dead Government Walking." It says the Premier "cannot win. The Ontario Premier's coming electoral-loss-to-be was written long before she became Liberal leader earlier this month.

"The now infamous story of the cancellation of two Ontario gas plants in Oakville and Mississauga—the latter during the last election—continues oh-so-justly to hound the Ontario Liberals. It has utterly blasted Liberal credibility in Ontario."

It goes on to suggest that "the gas plant shutdowns will cost Ontarians anywhere from a quarter of a billion to a billion dollars. And this is only one of a set of megamismenages by the McGuinty crowd: the green energy 'take the windmills and shut-up' policy, which so angered rural residents and local authorities; the scandals of the Ornge helicopter service; the eHealth mess; the massive deficits. All of this is what Premier Dad left in the curdled cup handed to" the now Premier.

"The scale of the waste matched the depth of the political cynicism involved," it continues. "Everything since—the prorogation of the Ontario legislature, the decamping of Premier McGuinty into private life, the hurried leadership convention—all has been for the tactical convenience of the minority Liberal government. All flowed from that decision on the campaign trail. The Liberals squeezed by with a minority win last time, but they will not be shielded much longer."

I'll end how the article ends by saying, "Nor should they be."

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'll return to the government House leader, who has two minutes to respond.

Hon. John Milloy: I appreciated the comments from my colleagues from Haldimand–Norfolk, Essex and Scarborough–Rouge River, and the uplifting comments from the member from Cambridge at the end.

The fact of the matter is, all parties in the House opposed the gas plant. That's a fact; that's part of the record.

I guess the question that I posed in my speech rhetorically—the question that was posed in the speech from the throne—is, we are a province that's facing some challenges; we've got a heck of a lot of work to do. What I'm hearing from folks in Kitchener Centre is, "Look, we have issues around health care, particularly with seniors and mental health." I think we can find consensus on it here in the Legislature. We have issues around transportation. We all recognize the needs of the 21st century in terms of infrastructure and transportation. We can find a consensus here in the Legislature.

Obviously, unemployment in general is a concern, but the issue of youth unemployment in particular is something that is concerning all of us and, I think, crosses all partisan lines. What people are saying to me, and what was outlined in the speech from the throne, is, "Why can we not, as a Legislature, sit down and find a way forward?"

That was the tone of the speech from the throne. That is the tone as we move forward with the budget discussions that we will have with the people of Ontario and with the folks across the way.

Mr. Speaker, it was a pleasure to speak today on the speech from the throne. I have to make one addition, though. I spoke about my weekend, and I forgot that on Friday I attended the House of Friendship's annual potato lunch. I want to give special congratulations to John Neufeld and all the people at the House of Friendship, who do such an outstanding great job caring for the less fortunate in our community and, at the same time, the literally dozens and dozens of volunteers who helped them out.

1720

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to be back in the Legislature and debating bills after our long leave of absence from the place. I just want to say from the outset that I want to share my time with the member from Halton, for our 20-minute cycle.

I know she's not here at the moment—I know we're not supposed to say that—but I want to congratulate the new Premier on her election as leader of the Liberal Party and thus the Premier of the province of Ontario.

As I said earlier, when we were on our prolonged break, prorogation, while the Liberals were reinventing themselves, our constituency offices did get a lot of

telephone calls and emails and letters demanding that we come back, because they actually recognize there's a jobs-and-debt crisis in the province of Ontario. I said I was more than willing to come back, but the Liberal Party needed time to reinvent itself, and so the business of Ontario was put on hold.

We were looking forward to the speech from the throne to see some new ideas, some new direction that we hope and we desperately need in the province of Ontario to go—but I think it was very sad to say that it was a missed opportunity. The speech from the throne was very nice, full of very eloquent ideas, a little bit Kumbaya-ish—but really, lots of conversations. The rubber does have to hit the road at some time. We need action. We saw a commitment to the Dalton McGuinty continuous legacy of stale ideas—no new opportunities that we desperately need in Ontario.

Just for recap of the state of the province that we are in, in 2002-03 we actually had a debt of \$132.6 billion; then we have seen that balloon almost 78% to \$235 billion. When the minister over there says we've all got to get together and we've got to fix the problems, well—

Mr. Michael Harris: Sing Kumbaya.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Yes, we've all got to sing Kumbaya.

We have to do a total change in direction or our financial house is going to fall and we will pay for nothing.

This government has an incredible spending problem. The increase from 2003 to now is 77.8%—

Mr. Michael Harris: Addiction.

Ms. Laurie Scott: My colleague says it's a spending addiction; it is.

Last month alone, we lost 48,000 private sector jobs—the greatest single-month job loss in several years. Of course, we all know—I'll just remind people at home—we are a have-not province. We have the highest debt and the highest unemployment, so we are kind of high in some respects. At the same time that we lost those private sector jobs last month, we also saw an addition of 9,000 public sector jobs created. This cannot continue; it does not work out.

We need specific action. We saw in the speech from the throne not a lot of details. As my leader indicated in his response, "The only way forward is to move swiftly and decisively in the direction you know in your gut is right, and right for this province."

We saw the Premier's group hug last week. There are still 600,000 Ontarians who don't have a job. In fact, while the entire province suffers from a lack of good jobs, the situation in my own riding of Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock is worse. We have a higher-than-average unemployment rate. We lack a lot of opportunities. As I say, every day my constituency office hears from people struggling to pay their hydro bills—especially in wintertime, their heating bills—or put food on their table. They can't even get to the point of "What are my children going to work at?" They are just so

consumed with getting through their daily life, and it is quite sad.

Most people aren't looking for a handout in my riding; they're looking for a job. They want to help themselves. They have pride.

Mr. Michael Harris: A hand up.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Yes, they want a hand up. The best thing we can do is give them a job. They do want to work. That is what the PC Party has been trying to achieve. We have put lots of ideas out there. We have 11 white papers out there. So when you say we're not working together—we're giving you our ideas. We've consulted with Ontarians constantly since we were elected. We want to steer Ontario in the right direction. I want to have hope and opportunity for the people of my riding and the people of the province of Ontario.

You cannot continue to put your head in the sand and ignore the crisis that exists in the province of Ontario. When business entrepreneurs say to me every day, "Why would I open up a business in the province of Ontario? Can I go through the burden of regulations and red tape?" The WSIB that came in in January—my goodness—the construction industry especially; how are they going to even look at employing young people in the summertime, which they usually do to see if they like the industry, to get their foot in the door? You are killing businesses.

Can I bring up the Endangered Species Act? Because you know I could talk at great length about that, how that is crippling our economy on several fronts. They speak of ROMA, the Rural Ontario Municipal Association, in town today. Go and talk to those people about the Endangered Species Act, about the burdens that this government has placed upon them.

When I say young people—and I know the minister brought up young people—why do they not change the apprenticeship system? How many years do I have to speak in the Legislature about changing the apprenticeship system? We need skilled tradespeople in Ontario, at least we know we need that. The government forecasts huge numbers, and yet we have an outdated system that prevents young people from entering that business. Instead, they set up the college of trades, which is just going to tax the current industry and does nothing for them. Let me tell you, the industries are mad, and so are a lot of the unions, about this college of trades. It's not helping young people get into the trades, nor is it helping the people that are in the trades.

When I speak about the size of the debt and deficit, it's the third-largest budget item. There's health care, there's education and there's servicing the deficit. How does that help us with programs to help the people that are disabled, to help in our health care sector, to make real changes in our education sector? If you don't have the money in the government, if you don't have people working, you cannot invest in these programs that we all hold near and dear, because of this government's out-of-control spending. We've seen that they've increased the size of government, which is going to cost us \$3 million more by adding—up to 27 cabinet ministers we have

now, from 22. That doesn't make sense and it doesn't show a path that they're going to control their spending.

We asked about a public sector wage freeze. Nowhere was it mentioned. We've asked questions continuously. When such a large part of your budget is in wages, you have to have public sector control and wage freezes happening. You cannot ignore it and you cannot progress without dealing with it. We have tried many, many times.

I only have a few minutes left, but you see in education where they spent \$8.5 billion more than in 2003, and yet we have 250,000 fewer students. Let me tell you, anybody that's been out in their ridings knows that the parents and the students aren't too happy with what's going on in the education system right now.

We talk about health care. I know in rural Ontario we certainly suffer from not having enough doctors in the system, but now with the changes that have occurred in the present government, I can't get people to get their lab tests done in these small communities. They're now having to travel out of their communities, and yet they've wasted so much money in Ornge. Or can we just talk about the boondoggle of eHealth? That money could have been spent on front-line services.

The list goes on for long-term care. The wait for beds is two years in most cases in our ridings. We've discussed people with mental health services—it's totally unacceptable, the mental health services we have in the province of Ontario, and some of them who are suicidal have to wait two years for assistance. So, yes, can money be better spent? Absolutely, money can be better spent in this province. People don't want to see the waste that continues on now.

We have the gas plants. I know there's lot of chat about the gas plants. It's up to \$1 billion of a promise and a plan that should never have existed. That's over \$1 billion they could have spent, again, into our province, into health care, into education, into social services, but they wasted that, and then they expect us to ignore that, to ignore the fact that they've covered up documents, to ignore that they prorogued—basically, because of that, the Premier stepped down. So we want to—

Mr. Michael Harris: The heat got too hot.

Ms. Laurie Scott: The heat is hot.

So we're hoping we can get sufficient committees to investigate this further, because yes, the people do want us to investigate where their money went to, because it's their money and it's not well spent.

The many issues of the killing of the horse racing industry, particularly in my riding with Kawartha Downs, and the many businesses that survived off that industry being cut out from underneath them with no consultation, that occurs again. Rural Ontario is getting hammered by a government that does not understand them and does not want to understand them.

1730

Mr. Speaker, if I could just say my last point, on the industrial wind turbines: The Premier made mention in her speech from the throne that she would have willing communities, willing hosts. The wind turbines that are

proposed in my riding have not got final approval, so I ask that she look at those wind turbines anyway. For four years, we've fought against those wind turbines in my riding, and she should listen. There's no way that this is a willing community to have wind turbines.

I want to share my time now with the member from Halton.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I recognize the member for Halton.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to let you know that I have great faith in the people of Ontario. I think Ontario is a great province, and Ontario will rise to lead again. It's the government over there that I don't have too much faith in. Ontario is a great province and it will be number one again; this government over here, not so much.

You know, our new Premier was sworn in on February 19. In her first initiative, she swore in a very large cabinet. She knew that would be controversial; why would she do that? Well, during her run for the leadership, which she won on January 26—and congratulations to her—there were many people in her caucus who helped her, and, of course that creates a debt. She needs to pay those people back, and she did so. She paid five or six of them back by creating a very large cabinet. That cabinet cost Ontario taxpayers a lot of extra money.

Why should we be concerned about a larger cabinet? Because it costs taxpayers a lot of extra money. Each cabinet minister probably has six or seven staff; they have a travel budget; they have chauffeurs; they have offices that they have to pay for. It probably costs close to \$1 million each. So that larger cabinet probably cost the taxpayers of this province \$5 million or \$6 million.

So here the Premier's first act that she did, the first thing she did on becoming Premier, was to pay back promises, pay back her debts, her leadership debts, to people in her caucus, and she did so at the expense of the Ontario taxpayer—spending Ontario taxpayers' money to pay her own debts. I'm sorry she did that, because it created an impression. In effect, this Premier paid \$5 million or \$6 million back to the people that she owed for her leadership, and that's too bad; that was taxpayers' money. This was done as the first item of business in her mandate. I wish her first action hadn't used taxpayers' money in this way.

But perhaps we shouldn't be surprised. The cancellation of the gas-fired power plants, they being in Mississauga and Oakville, was funded also by taxpayers' dollars. They cancelled the Mississauga plant during the election, and they did that in order to save five seats in Mississauga and Oakville and Etobicoke. So taxpayers funded a seat-saver program for the Liberal Party of Ontario. Who cancelled the plants? Well, the Minister of Energy, Chris Bentley at the time, said he did not do it. He said, in a committee hearing last summer, that the Liberal campaign team cancelled those plants. At that time, the Premier, Kathleen Wynne, was co-chair of the Liberal campaign team. So she was in charge, or pur-

portedly in charge, of running the campaign for the Liberals' re-election.

She claims she has no knowledge of the cancellation. That gives me great concern, that the Premier has taken that position. She was co-chair, and she's asking us to believe that the most important decision that the campaign team made during the election—she is suggesting that she had no knowledge, no input into that decision. At the very least, as a senior cabinet minister and as co-chair of the Liberal campaign team, she failed in her fiduciary responsibilities to the taxpayers of Ontario. I'd like to believe the Premier, but the facts make it very difficult to do so.

Then, on February 14—Valentine's Day; there was a lot of love in the air—the Premier wrote a letter to the leader of the PC Party and to the leader of the NDP, promising that a select committee would be struck to find out the conditions under which the gas plants were cancelled and who was responsible.

There were no conditions in that letter. It was a promise—a written promise. It seemed that she had a genuine desire to get the facts out. It seemed like a new beginning. However, then three days later, the government House leader, whom we just heard from, backtracked and added conditions—strings—to the promise, suggesting that the contempt charges had to be withdrawn before a select committee could be struck. Why was this condition all of a sudden put in? What happened after the February 14 promise? One might think that new information was given to the Premier, new information that made it necessary to backtrack on a written promise. She knew there would be backlash but she backtracked on it anyway.

Then, last Thursday, on February 21, more documents came from the OPA, the Ontario Power Authority, regarding the cancellation of the power plants, papers that incidentally had been held since last November and were not forthcoming until the contempt charges were reintroduced on February 20. So you have to ask the question, how much does the Premier know about that situation? In fact, how much have they told the Premier about this situation and who is it that is withholding this information from the Premier, if, in fact, we believe what she says? For one, I would like to believe her; she is the Premier of this province, and I would like to believe what she says. It means a lot to the integrity of our entire system.

If we look at the sequence of events that have happened here: First, the taxpayers' dollars were spent in order to enlarge the cabinet so the Premier could pay off her political debts; second, she denied involvement, she denied any knowledge of the power plants, even though she was co-chair and a senior cabinet minister at the time; and third, she reneged on the written promise to strike a select committee under very confusing situations—the introduction of contempt charges, the introduction of more papers and more documents from the Ontario Power Authority. Well, it hasn't been an auspicious start for this Premier.

If I were to give the Premier some advice, given the situation that Ontario is in today, I would suggest that she should clear the slate. I would suggest she should get the information out through any and all means possible. I would suggest that the select committee should be struck, where sworn witnesses can get to the bottom of this sordid affair. Do it this spring. Get it behind us. Get this whole situation behind us so that we can move forward with the things that Ontario needs desperately at this time. We can move forward with jobs; we can move forward with the reduction of red tape; we can move forward with all of the things that Ontario and the people of Ontario desperately need.

We currently have a debt of about \$250 billion that needs dramatic attention from this government and from this House, and it needs attention as soon as possible. We have a huge deficit. The government suggests it's going to be \$12 billion; I suspect it'll be a little larger than that, but it is certainly one of the largest we have had in history. This government has been saddled with debts and deficits since its beginning. We're currently spending, as a previous speaker said, \$11 billion in interest. Imagine what you could do with \$11 billion a year if we could only start reducing our debt. We could build 11 huge hospitals per year.

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We have to get on with the business of Ontario. We have to get on with the creation of jobs. We have to get on from being held up from that over this mess that's here. Finish with the mess. Have a select committee. Get it behind us.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, I'm going to take this opportunity, following the speech from Mr. Chudleigh, to go back to a point that I think all parties in this House should agree on and one that I believe needs to be recognized in the budget coming forward, and that is the recommendation coming from our party, from our leader, Andrea Horwath, that there be a five-day home care guarantee. I am quite sure that there is a shared experience of every person in this chamber of dealing with constituents who find themselves in a desperate situation, either personally or for an older member of their family, or a member of their family who is facing serious illness, where they have to wait for home care and find themselves in an impossible situation.

According to Ontario's Auditor General, in some communities Ontarians are waiting as long as six months to receive home care services. Speaker, you're very well aware that when people need nursing care at home, six months is not an acceptable wait time. Five days is still going to be something of a burden on some households, but frankly, five days as opposed to six months is something we could justify to the people of Ontario, something the people of Ontario would want.

You can't delay medical care, you can't delay home care for extended periods of time without having serious impact on people's lives. There's an opportunity for this

government to garner support from our party, to garner support from the majority of people living in this province by moving forward on this pledge.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to rise to speak and comment on the remarks made by my colleague opposite from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock.

I want to remind the House that the government's commitment through the throne speech focussed on fiscal responsibility, economic growth and increasing employment. I also want to remind the House that we have had an increase in employment to the tune of 388,200 net new jobs since June 2009. Furthermore, Ontario has recovered 143% of jobs lost since the recession. So I want to remind my colleagues opposite.

The other piece is that the throne speech clearly talks about job creation, and that our government, listening to the opposition members, will be creating the jobs strategy, which is being considered and supported by both opposition parties. Furthermore, our government is supportive of the business community. I don't know why my colleague opposite talks about killing businesses and what have you; yet in the throne speech, we talked about an increase in the exemption threshold for the employer health tax. Again, that's supportive of employers.

Furthermore, we are committed to reviewing corporate tax compliance. Furthermore, our government is committed to \$50 million to \$300 million of federal-provincial venture capital funds to support, again, businesses. Again, Mr. Speaker, we're also committed to increasing access to capital for small and medium-sized businesses, because we recognize as a government that the backbone of our communities is small businesses.

For the opposition members to say that we're not supporting businesses is absolutely not true. I welcome everyone to continue the dialogue, and listen to the opposition parties as well as our partners.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I listened very carefully to the comments that were made by my colleagues, the members from Halton and Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, excellent comments, in my view, on this throne speech that's been put forward by this government. I think, particularly financially, we have to recognize that we're in a very, very deep hole here in Ontario, much worse than I think most people realize. The member from Halton made mention of the fact that we're currently spending almost \$11 billion on interest for money that we've borrowed here in the province of Ontario over the last nine years. We're in a very deep hole, and if interest rates rise even by one percentage point, that means we're going to pay another \$500 million per year, just on interest—not on improving health care, not on improving our education system, just on servicing debt.

How we've gotten ourselves into this situation is because of uncontrolled spending on the other side; they don't know how to rein in spending. That's what causes

us a lot of concern and what's, frankly, putting us in the position of not being able to support this throne speech, because they've talked about vague generalities about how they're going to bring spending under control, but they're going to care a lot more than everybody else and they're going to continue that kind of spending. What we need to do is have a very strict approach to the way that we go on in Ontario. We need to make sure that we get our spending under control so that we can afford all these services.

We also need to have a very focused approach in kick-starting jobs and the economy here in Ontario. The youth unemployment rate currently stands at about 15%. It's something that I hear about a lot in my riding, where young people are forced to still live with their parents, not because they want to but because they don't have a job. They're coming out of universities with multiple degrees and there are still no jobs for them to go to. That's what we were hoping to hear from this throne speech. We didn't hear that. Regrettably, we're not going to be able to support it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm pleased to comment on the remarks made by the member from Halton. I think what he's attempting to do as a senior member in this House and someone who, I think, takes a pragmatic approach to policy development—and principle, actually—is to offer you some space, as the government, to do the right thing, to I guess press rewind on some of the failed exercises that you've embarked on, to give yourselves the room and the mea culpa on the gas plant fiasco and move it outside of this Legislature to where full public scrutiny and full debate can be had and impartiality can reign supreme, rather than the constant legislative roadblocks and strategic roadblocks that we saw in the previous session, whether it was the striking of committees or the construct of committees or all of the other games that I think members are familiar with in this House. We need to see a real, tangible effort made on the part of the government to own up to the mistakes and to set the tone for future progress and future policy development.

Anything other than that, really, only adds to the cynicism that we on this side of the House feel in your approach to the work that this body needs to do. It also, of course, adds to the cynicism and the palpable disdain that I think the public in general have for the way in which this government has approached each and every aspect of its policy development.

Honestly, Mr. Speaker, it is not looking good out there for the good Liberal government. I think they know that. That's obviously why they prorogued. That's obviously why so many of their main ministers jumped ship. We're also giving them an opportunity now to keep that boat afloat a little bit, but do it for the right reasons, for the people of the province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. One of the opposition members has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I thank the members for Toronto—Danforth and Scarborough East. The member for Scarborough East's comments were interesting.

The member for Eglinton stood up and talked about the demise of his favourite restaurant earlier this afternoon. That is happening all across Ontario. It's not just restaurants; it's all kinds of small businesses. Those businesses are disappearing, and that's what's causing the demise of Ontario. That's what's causing your lack of income and tax revenues. The member doesn't see that.

The trouble with backbencher members is, they're listening to the government. They're drinking the Kool-Aid. It's not what's happening in Ontario. Get out there and understand what's happening to the businesses in Ontario: They're failing. It's just not good out there, and it's very, very difficult.

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The lack of co-operation that we get from the government—the day that the Premier appointed this same House leader—the same House leader who argued for months about the construction of the committees of the House, who argued for months and then cancelled the committees, wouldn't reappoint the committees in September, wouldn't give us information about what is going to be debated next week or what is going to be debated in the House until the last minute, had absolutely no co-operation with the other parties whatsoever, and as soon as he was reappointed as House leader, the co-operation in this House—the die was cast. The co-operation in this House would not be good because of his past performance in this House and the way he has represented—

Interjection.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: He's having a great time making fun of me over here, but the truth is, when he was appointed House leader, this Premier did not want the co-operation of this place.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, I appreciate the support from the government House leader in this matter.

There are a number of critical points that I want to touch on before I go into some detail about the speech from the throne, and the first is, it's very clear to everyone in this chamber and everyone in this province that families are being squeezed hard by tough times. We hear about it in our constituency offices. We hear about it when we go to community events. We see it when we go down streets where businesses are closed.

We know that, right now, Ontario is facing some very tough times. People want government action to restore the economy, to bring back jobs, to deal with health care, to make life more affordable and to take a balanced approach to balancing Ontario's books. That's the context, that's the frame, within which people see our action or inaction here in this Legislature.

The speech from the throne was presented very recently. It had a lot of promising talk; had some interesting language. But, unless the promising talk is converted into real action in the coming budget, then we won't be able

to support it. This government will have to look elsewhere for support. We'll have to figure out how exactly it's going to get something passed if it doesn't have a number of solid steps taken to address the concerns of the people of Ontario, a number of which we talk about in our response to that speech.

The government's throne speech was vague, lacked details or concrete plans to create jobs for youth, to crack down on corporate tax loopholes, to make auto insurance more affordable and to deal with the very pressing needs in community care and health care. We saw promises on some of the proposals that New Democrats have put forward, but there was silence or simple rejection on the part of others.

In this session, we're going to look for the government to take action, to show leadership, on job creation, health care, making life more affordable, and dealing with those tough times that all of us see manifesting themselves across this province.

It's our intention as New Democrats to get results for people in this minority Parliament. It's the reason we're here: to get those results. If we're not getting those results, you have to ask yourself, Speaker, why do we stay in this chamber?

In concrete terms, what are the things that we want to see? Not just well-worded, interestingly worded speeches from the throne; what do we need to see in the budget to actually make a difference for people in Ontario? One of those is ending corporate tax loopholes. This new Premier has got to pay attention to, and act on, closing those corporate tax loopholes so that we actually have the money that we need, to do what people in this province expect from us.

The government indicated they'd move forward on some corporate tax compliance recommendations in the Drummond report and they'd explore an increase in the employer health tax. They announced a commission on the reform of Ontario's public services.

The Drummond report recommended reducing the ability of corporations to eliminate or decrease payment of provincial corporate income tax by shifting profit and losses across Canada. Speaker, why wouldn't we do that? Why would we in Ontario effectively just pass money on to corporations in other provinces, when we are so well aware of what's needed right here in this province? We know that there are practices that need to be eliminated, that need to be changed, that have to be addressed.

With regard to the employer health tax exemption, to help small businesses—and this is a worthy goal—the province doesn't collect employer health tax on the first \$400,000 of payroll. It makes sense to do that, but it doesn't make sense to apply that to all businesses in Ontario. Ontario should retain the employer health tax rules for small businesses. At the same time, they should eliminate the exemption on the first \$400,000 of payroll for all companies with payrolls over \$5 million, or roughly 100 employees. That would mean approximately \$90 million a year for the treasury. With \$90 million here

and \$90 million there, soon you're talking about the money needed to balance the budget and provide people in this province with the services that they need.

Speaker, as you're well aware, young people in this province have tremendous difficulty getting a toehold in the job market, getting that experience that they need to be able to speak about when they apply for jobs. They need support getting into companies. We're encouraged that the government has indicated that they have a willingness to help young people get on-the-job training. We, however, are going to need to see the details about how this program will actually be implemented.

In 2012, there were 182,000 unemployed Ontarians between the ages of 16 and 24. Speaker, like you, and I'm sure this is the case, I have talked to many young people who come into my office—and the parents of those young people—who cannot get a job in the field where they've had training, cannot get a job that pays more than minimum wage, and in many cases can't get a job at all. People expect us to act on those needs, to address those concerns.

We've proposed a First Start program to get young people into jobs. We want to provide young people aged 16 to 26 years an entry point to long-term employment opportunities, opportunities that will allow people to get on their feet and establish a track record so they'll be able to go on to other employment in the future. We've calculated that with an investment from this government, we could create over 25,000 jobs within two years, with participants learning new on-the-job skills and earning their own income.

Speaker, if this government is serious in its statements in the speech from the throne that it wants to deal with youth unemployment, then it makes complete sense for this government to take these suggestions, carry them forward as they're writing their budget, as they're looking at what is it that will actually pass in this Legislature in the months to come.

As I mentioned earlier, we need a guarantee that people will get home care, community care, when they need it. We need a timeline to implement a home care guarantee. It was nice to hear that the government has a willingness to get seniors the home care they need, but we need those details. We have to have a substantive commitment that we can see delivering real home care to people in a very short time.

As I've said earlier, Ontario's Auditor General has said that in some communities, Ontarians are waiting as long as six months to receive home care services. Currently, there are 6,100 Ontarians on the home care wait list—far too many.

Speaker, you seem to be indicating something.
Debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Yes. I would draw the member's attention to the fact that it is 6 of the clock. As such, we will adjourn the House until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1801.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Dave Levac

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Tonia Grannum, Trevor Day, Anne Stokes

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Cansfield, Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	
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Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga-Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax-Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale-High Park	
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
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Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Kitchener-Waterloo	

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Harris, Michael (PC)	Kitchener-Conestoga	
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington	
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Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West-Glanbrook / Niagara-Ouest-Glanbrook	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
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MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean-Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga-Brampton South / Mississauga-Brampton-Sud	
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McDonell, Jim (PC)	Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry	
McGuinty, Dalton (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	
McKenna, Jane (PC)	Burlington	
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McNaughton, Monte (PC)	Lambton-Kent-Middlesex	
McNeely, Phil (LIB)	Ottawa-Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa-Vanier	
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound-Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East-Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est-Stoney Creek	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre délégué aux Affaires francophones
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Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement

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Naqvi, Hon. / L'hon. Yasir (LIB) Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Orazietti, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB) Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Essex	
Piruzza, Hon. / L'hon. Teresa (LIB) Prue, Michael (NDP)	Chatham-Kent-Essex	
Sandals, Hon. / L'hon. Liz (LIB) Schein, Jonah (NDP)	Durham	
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Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (LIB) Singh, Jagmeet (NDP)	Perth-Wellington	
Tabuns, Peter (NDP) Wong, Soo (LIB)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse
Sousa, Hon. / L'hon. Charles (LIB) Vanthof, John (NDP)	Beaches-East York	
Walker, Bill (PC) Wilson, Jim (PC)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Yakabuski, John (PC) Zimmer, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB) Vacant	Guelph	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Yurek, Jeff (PC) Vacant	Davenport	
Yukich, Hon. / L'hon. Jim (PC) Zimmer, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock	
Yurzak, Hon. / L'hon. Gord (PC) Zimmer, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	Minister Responsible for Seniors / Ministre délégué aux Affaires des personnes âgées Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Zimmer, Hon. / L'hon. Jim (PC) Zimmer, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Thornhill	
Zimmer, Hon. / L'hon. Jim (PC) Zimmer, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Bramalea-Gore-Malton	
Zimmer, Hon. / L'hon. Jim (PC) Zimmer, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Prince Edward-Hastings	
Zimmer, Hon. / L'hon. Jim (PC) Zimmer, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Zimmer, Hon. / L'hon. Jim (PC) Zimmer, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Toronto-Danforth	Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / Président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement
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No. 5

Nº 5

ISSN 1180-2987

Legislative Assembly of Ontario

Second Session, 40th Parliament

Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

Deuxième session, 40^e législature

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)



Journal des débats (Hansard)

Tuesday 26 February 2013

Mardi 26 février 2013

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
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Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



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Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
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Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 26 February 2013

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 26 février 2013

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

THRONE SPEECH DEBATE

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 25, 2013, on the motion for an address in reply to the speech of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor at the opening of the session.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate? Mr. Tabuns had the floor. Mr. Tabuns is not here, so therefore we entertain further debate.

The member from Oak Ridges—Markham.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It certainly is a pleasure to rise in this House and make a few remarks in relation to the speech from the throne entitled The Way Forward.

As everyone knows, last week the government opened the second session of the 40th Parliament with a new leader, Premier Kathleen Wynne. It was a historic moment when Kathleen Wynne became the first female Premier of Ontario, and I'd like to take this opportunity to congratulate her.

Now, as we all know as representatives in our individual ridings, our most important duty as an elected representative is to represent the feelings, the aspirations, the hopes of our constituents. And over the last few months, I've certainly had the opportunity to have many, many conversations with the constituents in my riding of Oak Ridges—Markham. So I'm going to focus on the areas of the throne speech that particularly address their concerns.

As we've outlined in The Way Forward, we have a number of priority areas; first of all, a strong economy. Through fiscal responsibility, economic growth and increased employment, we will be strong economic stewards. We will take a balanced approach—I think that's a word that we have used on this side of the House over the last several years, certainly since I've been here—in our approach. And so we will take a balanced approach to the budget and seek innovative ways to create new jobs and address youth employment.

Our government will work to coordinate services, through renewed partnerships, to ensure all individuals can participate in this economy, while reducing govern-

ment spending and eliminating the deficit by 2017-18. I can assure the members of this House that this sense of fiscal responsibility is one that's very much valued by the constituents in my riding of Oak Ridges—Markham.

Secondly, The Way Forward also includes a commitment to a fair society with a new sense of community, where individuals can prosper by being afforded important social supports such as expanded home care and mental health services—I'm focusing on those as a particular interest of mine. Investment in infrastructure and transit networks will provide important and necessary community links where municipalities and families play an important role in shaping their communities.

Perhaps most importantly of all, The Way Forward also includes references to an effective and accountable Legislature. With renewed co-operation, collaboration and respect, legislative partners can work together in this minority government to ensure the success and prosperity of Ontario. Though our views and backgrounds may differ, we have a common goal: a more prosperous Ontario.

This collaborative approach is one that I've heard over and over in my riding. There is no appetite for an election in the near future. The message from my constituents is, "Make this government work." I know on this side of the House we have every intention of trying to do our part in that regard.

As the member of provincial Parliament for the great riding of Oak Ridges—Markham, I'm optimistic that our government will deliver on what is important to my constituents. Our government's successes to date and our Way Forward touch on the key issues that are important for Oak Ridges—Markham constituents. Improved transportation infrastructure is top of mind for all in my area of York region and in the 905. Investment in home care and aging at home is a key consideration as we face our aging society and the need to deliver appropriate care. Also, the whole area of mental health issues—ensuring that everyone can play their part in the economy, that everyone finds their place. So I'm optimistic that, with our legislative partners, we can work together to achieve these goals, and I know that the people of my riding and the people of Ontario expect it of us.

In relation to improving transportation infrastructure, I think we should all acknowledge that a strong transportation infrastructure is the foundation of a strong economy; the movement of people and goods is fundamental to that goal. It has been one of our government's key commitments, and continues to be in this new session. Our transportation strategy has been about moving the econ-

omy and connecting communities with improvements to the way transit is planned and funded.

As York region continues to experience rapid growth, many of my constituents in Oak Ridges—Markham have contacted me regarding the region's transportation needs. They ask for better highways, interchanges, roads, bridges, as well as a modern, efficient and integrated public transit system that will help improve their travel time—whether it be between home and work, home and school—to reduce traffic congestion on our roads, the source of such frustration for so many of us causing gridlock, and, of course, to reduce our impact on the environment. The air in Oak Ridges—Markham is certainly very clean and pleasant as one leaves the city and moves over the Oak Ridges moraine, and maintaining our environment is especially important in my riding.

We have seen many improvements over the years to our transportation infrastructure. Our government, since 2003, has committed more than \$30 billion to Ontario's infrastructure, and we have demonstrated our commitment to getting people out of cars and onto public transit by investing more than \$16.1 billion in public transit, including more than \$7.7 billion in GO Transit. Our government has delivered two cents per litre of provincial gas tax revenues to municipalities as a source of long-term sustainable funding for transit. York region has received more than \$83 million in gas tax funding since 2003. York region has also been provided with \$620.4 million in provincial transit funding. The commitment to the vivaNext bus rapid transit is some \$1.4 billion over 10 years, and anyone who has driven along what we still call Highway 7, or Yonge Street, in York region, or Davis Drive, will know that this is creating employment opportunities for many, many individuals as the construction goes forward.

Many of my constituents depend on GO train transit to commute to their jobs. I'm fortunate enough to have five GO train stations in my riding: Markham, Mount Joy, Stouffville, Lincolnville and King City. And we have the commitment from this government—in fact, when the Premier was Minister of Transportation, she came to Gormley in my riding in Richmond Hill to announce the extension of the Richmond Hill GO train line up to Gormley, and certainly I will be pushing for that extension to go all the way up to the Aurora side road. This will tremendously benefit residents in my riding.

0910

We also have additional bus service between York region and Toronto, increased GO service on the Bradford, Barrie, Stouffville and Richmond Hill corridors, and one of the most popular improvements has been the addition of some 3,553 parking spaces at the five GO train stations in my riding. Trains are now 12 cars long. That is posing some problems in terms of extension of platforms, but we are committed to this continuous improvement in our transit services.

A summer project, which was weekend service on the Barrie GO line, was exceptionally popular with residents in King township in my riding, also at the north end of

Richmond Hill. They availed themselves of that service and found it very convenient.

So our government truly has a vision to transform GO Transit from a commuter service to a regional transit service with the introduction of two-way all-day service on all seven rail lines. This, of course, was outlined in our policy the Big Move, and it is incorporated in the GO 2020 strategic service vision.

Our government recognizes that transit infrastructure is important to our future prosperity, and renews this commitment. This proved popular with York regional chair Bill Fisch. In fact, he has recently been quoted as saying, "The provincial throne speech demonstrates the Liberal government's continued commitment to reducing traffic gridlock by accelerating transit and road infrastructure across the greater Toronto and Hamilton area.... This bodes well for York region and the future extension of the Yonge subway north to Richmond Hill." It's clear that our communities and all levels of government—municipal, regional, provincial and federal—need to be part of this conversation.

Now turning to a topic very close to my heart—and as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care I certainly intend to vigorously pursue these areas, and I was very pleased to hear that the New Democratic Party also has found in particular home care, aging at home, to be an important priority for them as well. I hope we'll be able to work together effectively in this particular area. We have been investing in patient-centred care and evidence-based health policy that is strong and innovative. We all know that we're living longer and the number of seniors living in Ontario is increasing. Many of the constituents in my riding of Oak Ridges have, in fact, three generations living under one roof. So couples are often responsible for taking care of their children and their aging parents, and they are seeking services that will help their aging parents live healthy and independent lives. Ontario's Action Plan for Health Care will support Ontario's seniors who want to live independently at home by providing more home care supports. We are shifting resources into home care services so that seniors can stay at home longer. We have, in fact, committed to increase investments in home care and community services by an average of 4% annually, or some \$526 million by 2014-15.

Through the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, Ontario is also further improving quality, accountability and access to programs and services that benefit seniors, including these efforts to keep older adults active, healthy and engaged in their communities, by providing funding to elderly persons centres across Ontario. Perhaps that's not the most attractive name; perhaps it needs a branding of some sort, but the intention is clear: to have a hub designated as an elderly persons centre where people can come together, enjoy social contact and access services as they need them.

We're committed to reducing the number of alternate-level-of-care patients in hospitals, thereby helping decrease emergency room wait times.

We want to continue to strengthen mental health and addiction community supports, lower the price of most generic drugs and, of course, improve access to primary care through initiatives such as family health teams and nurse-practitioner-led clinics.

An example of a family health team in my riding is the Markham Family Health Team, and I'm very impressed by their numbers and their stats. They've now hired some 19 physicians and 14 additional health care professionals. They're caring now for some 26,000 people, and of those, some 6,600 were previously unattached patients—in other words, people who had not had access to a primary care physician previously. So this is serving the residents in Markham extremely well.

Ontario's Action Plan for Seniors is one of the ways Ontario is addressing the challenges and opportunities posed by its aging population, and it is a guide on how to help seniors in Ontario to be independent, active and maintain good health. The plan is focused on active aging, improved safety and security, and better access to high-quality health care in the community.

As part of the plan, we will be putting in place a number of new initiatives. One of these is called Health Links. Health Links is a program that will identify high-need seniors with complex conditions and then develop a personalized care plan to ensure that they and their care coordinators are properly connected to their primary care providers. I was extremely pleased to see that the Ontario Medical Review—which is the official publication of the Ontario Medical Association—in its February edition had as its feature article a couple of pages dedicated to Health Links, in order that family physicians can better understand what the program is all about.

The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and the OMA have formed a joint committee to explore engagement of the OMA in the process and, on behalf of physicians, ways of advancing a meaningful collaboration. The joint committee provides a mechanism and forum for critical dialogue and meaningful feedback to the ministry. I think this is very important. As we know, we need to renew these conversations with our partners in the health care sector.

The Ontario Action Plan for Seniors builds upon a solid foundation of what has already been done. Of course, we will recall from the last session that we were able to pass the Healthy Homes Renovation Tax Credit with up to \$1,500 annually, and home improvements like ramps and lifts made on or after October 1, 2011, are eligible for personal income tax returns, starting with the 2012 return. Hopefully, through the lengthy process of passing that simple bill, seniors were urged to maintain their receipts and keep them so they can avail themselves of this tax credit.

Of course, we did pass the Retirement Homes Act in 2010 to ensure that retirement homes were regulated for the first time in this province, to ensure that residents are protected from abuse and neglect and that there was appropriate staff training on abuse, things like fire prevention and safety—and whistle-blowing protections.

We've made some substantial progress, and I know our government is committed to continuing this kind of progress in particular for seniors.

Turning to mental health, again mentioned in the throne speech as a key priority, as a member of the Select Committee on Mental Health and Addictions, I think all of those of us who were involved in that thankfully non-partisan committee had the opportunity to see the challenges that are with us when it comes to mental health issues. It's imperative that we continue to expand access to mental health services and support, and reduce the stigma for people coping with mental illness. Efforts must be on preventing, identifying and treating mental health and addictions, given that mental health affects the lives of some one in five Ontarians.

Our comprehensive mental health and addictions strategy is committed to building a mental health system that delivers high-quality, timely services and supports to children, youth and families when they need them and as close to home as possible. It is a joint initiative, this strategy, of the Ministries of Children and Youth Services, Health and Long-Term Care, Education, and Training, Colleges and Universities. The fundamental goal is, of course, to provide timely, high-quality, integrated, personally directed health care as well as other human services that are so important for those with mental health issues, such as housing, income support, employment and diversion from the justice system.

0920

The first three years of our strategy have focused on children and youth, and an estimated 20,000 more children are already benefitting from the supports and services provided by 600 newly hired mental health workers in schools, communities and courts, who are providing quicker and easier access to the right mental health services and supports. In areas serviced by the Central LHIN, which covers my riding in York region and Simcoe county, some 72 mental health workers are helping children, young people and their families get quicker and easier access to the right mental health services and supports. Investments for York region in children's mental health have included funding for 15 agencies and some \$46 million in fiscal funding for 2012-13.

The region of York has also received considerable funds—some \$41.4 million for non-residential subsidies and \$3.4 million for residential subsidies—to assist those in terms of finding a roof over their heads.

Our government will continue to expand mental health services, and we want especially to move more comprehensively into the adult population. The goal, clearly, is so that every Ontarian can achieve their full potential.

In conclusion, I look forward to the comments from the parties opposite in relation to our throne speech. I know that the residents in Oak Ridges-Markham are totally committed to having a minority government that works. They want us to work together. We have the opportunity with this new session to do that. We have the opportunity to work on the priorities that our residents

express to us, and I feel confident that with goodwill on all sides, we will be able to achieve this goal.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Comments and questions? The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's nice to see you back in the chair.

This throne speech—it was said yesterday a couple of times how these things are very vague documents. This was vaguer than most. But the other thing that I really found very disappointing in this throne speech was the condescending way in which it spoke to the members of this Legislature.

When you look around this Legislature, many of the members here have been elected and re-elected, some re-elected more than once. To listen to the matronly advice that we're receiving in this throne speech about how we should conduct ourselves as MPPs—what business is that in a throne speech? That's again more of the kind of empty rhetoric that we've seen from this government when it comes to really tackling the problems of Ontario. Telling members how to behave—I don't need any of your advice on how to deal with my people in Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. I understand them, I know them; they know me. Most of you people have never been near the place. So when your Premier starts to tell us—

Hon. James J. Bradley: I've been there.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Yes, Jim Bradley's been there, Bob Chiarelli's been there. I worked well with Bob Chiarelli when he was minister—

Interjections.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Oh, a whirlwind tour through the riding—they know nothing about the people who I represent, and I am absolutely insulted that a Premier who takes her seat in here for the first time is going to start telling me how to conduct myself in my riding of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

I have absolute faith in my colleagues on this side of the House, I have faith in the members who are elected as NDP and I have faith in the members who are elected as Liberals that they understand their ridings best and they will do what is best for the people who they're elected to represent. We don't need some kind of matronly advisory committee telling us how to behave ourselves in our ridings from the throne speech from this new Premier.

Shame on her. Let's get to the business of buckling down and making Ontario a better place.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Bramalea–Gore–Malton.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: The member for Oak Ridges–Markham made a number of good points, and I want to echo some of the sentiments of working together. I appreciate that.

I was particularly concerned by the member from Pembroke–Nipissing's remarks using the word "matronly." I don't know what he was trying to suggest by that. I think that's somewhat troubling. I don't think there's any problem with whether the advice comes from a woman or

from a man. I think you should attack the advice, not the source of it—somewhat troubling.

But one of my concerns with the member from Oak Ridges–Markham's remarks was that, while I agree wholeheartedly we need to invest in transit, one of the issues is that if we look at the past nine years, the track record of this government hasn't been very reassuring when it comes to investments into transit. I think there could be a lot more done in this file, and there needs to be a lot more done.

There are many areas of the province which are lacking absolutely in infrastructure, particularly in affordable and efficient transit. I was just speaking with my colleague from Welland; Niagara to the peninsula is sorely lacking. The suburbs are sorely lacking in the GTA. That issue needs to be addressed. The fact that over these past nine years there hasn't been a lot of movement is disturbing.

With home care and with alternative methods of delivery of health care, like community health centres—this is an opportunity for us to get ahead of spending. This is a way to be proactive. By investing in home care, by investing in other alternatives to health care delivery like community health centres, we can actually end up saving the province a lot of money by providing care up front so that people can stay in their homes, so people can access ready health care instead of relying on hospitals, which are already overburdened. This is a more efficient delivery of health care. Instead of seeing seniors being put into chronic care or long-term care, they can stay in their homes.

I think this is a way to be more proactive and I think this is the direction we need to head in.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Hon. John Milloy: It's a pleasure to stand and congratulate my colleague from Oak Ridges–Markham on, I think, a very thoughtful speech that I listened to intently. The latter part of the speech focused on an issue of health care, which is, of course, very near and dear to her heart, not only because she's an excellent representative of her community, where health care—like in so many communities—is a top priority, but she herself, as I think members know, is a very well respected physician and an expert in the field, particularly in the area of public health.

I think what was important in her speech, as she pointed out, was the vision in the speech from the throne of a true health care system, one where we see the connection between community-based care and its ability to keep people out of the more expensive acute care; to keep people in the community active longer, particularly in terms of seniors. She spoke with great eloquence about the outlined vision in the speech from the throne concerning home care and its important role in maintaining seniors' quality of life and, as I say, their ability to continue to function in the community.

The other part of her speech that I wanted to remark upon was the first part about this whole issue of co-

operation within the Legislature. I was reading this morning's Waterloo Region Record, and there's a letter to the editor I'd like to share here in closing. It says, "Ontario Progressive Conservative leader Tim Hudak is quoted as saying his party wants an election." Well, this gentleman, Carl Kaufman of Waterloo, writes, "Why can't the three major provincial leaders sit down at Tim Hortons and choose what is good for taxpayers and the economy instead of what is good for them?"

I think, Madam Speaker, that is a sentiment that I hear all the time. It's time to make this Legislature work. When you think of the themes that are outlined in the speech from the throne in terms of health care, in terms of the economy, in terms of a whole variety of issues, there are no great partisan differences here. Why can't we sit down and—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Further comments?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I do appreciate the opportunity to address the speech from the throne, and I'll have an opportunity to speak at greater length in a few moments.

I would, however, like to say this: I think this government missed the mark with their throne speech. To listen to the government House leader talk about "Why can't we all just get along?"—well, let me respond directly to him. Over the past year and a half, this side of the House, along with the New Democrats, has tried in vain to change the standing orders, to have an inquiry on a gas plant, and the single biggest obstacle to that progress was that House leader, who chose to be very difficult to negotiate with, and we know that. They set the tone after the last election.

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Now, it would be different, I guess, if a new Premier came in with a whole new agenda and a new set of ideas. But unfortunately, given the fact that we have a former Liberal cabinet minister, a Liberal MPP who served with Dalton McGuinty, we have the same old ideas—nothing new to offer to the residents of Nepean–Carleton, to the province of Ontario's residents. We don't have very much to offer by way of anything different with this throne speech that this Liberal Party has put forward. That is, of course, from our perspective, why we shouldn't support it: It's more of the same.

We believe that Ontario needs bold new ideas. We need to get our province back on track. We need to reinvigorate our economy. That can't be done with the tired old gang across the way. They may have changed who the Premier is at a party convention, but that does not give them any more credibility to continue to govern. I must say, Speaker, the only way we're going to see change is by changing the team from this side of the House over to there.

Thank you very much, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Oak Ridges–Markham has two minutes to respond.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'd like to thank all the members for their comments.

In particular to the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, we trust that you know your riding inside out. I think what we would like to hear from the member, in fact, are some constructive comments.

Our throne speech is broad. It points to certain priorities. There is every opportunity for the two opposition parties to present very constructive comments in relation to the aspirations of the residents of their ridings. So I would earnestly hope that the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke will in fact share some of those constructive ideas with us.

To the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton, yes, we share ridings with some similar characteristics, and the priorities of transit and home care that are important to him of course are extremely important to us.

The government House leader has reiterated the position that so many of our constituents are telling us—that we do not need an election in the short term, in the near term; that they wish us to make this minority government work—and I think many of us are taking that very much to heart. I would certainly and earnestly hope that all members of this House will continue to do the best as they know how for their residents.

The member from Nepean–Carleton: I look forward to your comments. I didn't hear too many in relation to the priorities as I outlined them, but clearly we always welcome your comments as well.

In summary, Madam Speaker, this, I believe, is the way forward for Ontario. I believe it's the way forward for my constituents, and I intend to do everything in my power to ensure that their needs are met. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It is a tremendous honour, as always, to provide comment on either a throne speech or a budget, because it's a unique opportunity by which you can bring the views and the values of your constituents to the floor of this assembly and feel unencumbered by just talking about specific legislation, but speak more about the hopes and dreams and aspirations of your constituents.

I'm also pleased to be splitting my time with my colleague from Dufferin–Caledon. She and I arrived at this place not exactly at the same time, but we have become great friends. I know that she will defend her constituents' views, as I will today.

Speaker, when I first arrived at Queen's Park in 2006—it was a March by-election—I had the opportunity to speak to the Ontario budget. It gave me, in my maiden speech, an ability to really get to know better the people that I represent, to talk to them, to consult with them. Of course I did that on the campaign trail, but once you're an MPP you have that opportunity. I learned a lot about my constituents, and I've always kept that with me over the past seven years: what drives them, and what makes me tick on the floor of this assembly.

I must say, when I read in the throne speech one simple line, it encapsulated to me how disconnected this

government is from the people whom I represent; that line was “A New Sense of Community.”

We don’t need lessons in Nepean–Carleton from a Liberal government on what a sense of community is. My community started with agrarian roots. People like Aubrey Moodie set the stage, and he became Nepean’s first founder. They settled the land that I represent as one of self-reliance, where people didn’t expect government to do what they could do themselves, and they wanted government to stay out of their way.

I represent, in Barrhaven and Riverside South and Findlay Creek, a lot of strong families, a growing population. There are requirements in our community that we need to keep up with the expanding population, but at the same time, we just need to be out of the way of moms and dads. One of the things that’s very important to my residents is safe streets, and that’s why I’ve been pleased to work with the Ottawa police and the Royal Ottawa Hospital, most recently, on dealing with the fentanyl abuse happening in my community, particularly in Manotick. I worked with the member from Ottawa Centre, who is now the Minister of Labour, on making Ottawa a suicide-safer community. And last year, I actually brought to the floor a change that I expect to see in the legislation on a coroner’s inquest, because my friends Sheri and Pat Leighton lost their son Eric at school in a shop class. I want to see some sensible coroners amendments to that act so that we can make sure that if this ever happens again, if a child dies on school property, another family will not have to come all the way from Barrhaven to Queen’s Park to demand an inquest, that that will be an automatic action.

So those are some of the things that I’ve worked on in the last year. That’s just a small part of some of the things that I’ve worked on in the last year, but I think it says to this assembly that my community doesn’t need a new sense of community; we already are a strong community. We know how our land was settled. We know who established a great, strong community, and we are thriving as a result of that.

These folks that I represent want to deal with and tackle the issues that affect them every day. They don’t need a Premier telling them that what they’ve been doing all along is wrong and they’re going to make a new sense of community, when that Premier doesn’t know our end of the province.

I look, for example, at a big issue that is important to my constituents in the rural part of Ottawa. The Minister of Agriculture is really important, and for this Premier to just assume she can tack it on—at the end of being Premier Wynne, she’ll also be Minister of Agriculture—then she forgot to put in “Food,” and now she’s the Minister of Agriculture and Food after a secret swearing-in service. Speaker, that, to me, sends an awful lot of disrespect to the people that I represent. It shows a lot of disconnect between the Liberal government at Queen’s Park and the people that I represent in Nepean–Carleton, the people of Osgoode, Vernon, North Gower and Kars and Burritts Rapids.

It’s very difficult for me to go to my community and express any level of comfort with this Liberal government, because the people that I represent are not happy with this Liberal government; they’re upset with this Liberal government. And then, to add insult, this Liberal government prorogued the assembly to shut my voice down, their representative voice that they expected at Queen’s Park. They shut that down for five months. They didn’t want our ability to ask questions of the government. This Liberal government didn’t want to have any questions asked, predominantly because they were embroiled in a major scandal.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Several.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Several scandals, as my colleague said.

And so the people that I represent, who value self-reliance, safer streets and strong families, the people I represent, whose community was built on agrarian roots and who are now experiencing explosive growth, expected that I would be here in this assembly to discuss the important issues of the day, and to them that’s the economy, the high prices of hydro, the scandals, but that side of the House prevented me from being able to do that for them.

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I highlighted some of the issues that have been important to me that I’ve been able to work on: Ottawa’s Suicide Safer Community, calling for a coroner’s inquest and sensible changes to that act; and, of course, dealing with the drug abuse problems with some of our teens, some of whom have lost their lives. Those are really important issues to my community.

But this throne speech doesn’t reflect what’s important to my community. I therefore cannot support it, Speaker—I cannot support their throne speech. I do not have confidence in this government to do what is needed for my constituents, and the people of Nepean–Carleton fundamentally expected me, when they elected me, just like all of my colleagues expect when they were elected to this chamber, to be able to stand up in it, not have our voices shut down by a prorogued Parliament.

That is where this big disconnect widens and that gap between the government of Ontario—this Liberal government—and my constituents widens. They deserve a government that responds to their needs, not rewrites what the sense of a community is, that not only would defend agriculture, but understand that the food department needs to be part of it.

My constituents also expect that their government would be honest and truthful, but a pattern of behaviour has developed even in the mere week that this Premier has been leading this province. Her base instincts are to keep things secret.

Now, I’m going to give you a couple of examples before I cede the floor to my colleague from Dufferin–Caledon. Here’s the first one: On the gas plant documents, she didn’t want to come out and let us know that more existed. In fact, she stood in the chamber and said that we had everything we needed to know. Then the next

day—whoopsie—her Minister of Energy found about 6,000 more documents. She wanted to keep it secret.

Number two: When Minister Wynne naively decided she wanted to be Minister of Agriculture, and split agriculture, rural affairs and food, she forgot to add “food” at the swearing-in.

Hon. James J. Bradley: She did not forget that.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: She forgot that. Not only did she forget that; she had to have a secret swearing-in service that she wasn’t going to tell anybody about.

I’m also the education critic, and I won’t delve too deeply into that because I’ll have an opportunity to do that this afternoon, but recently, when she was meeting with labour leaders—she has been secretly negotiating behind closed doors. We don’t know what the deal is.

Those are three examples in seven days of a Premier who has now established herself as a secret-keeper, a person who is not prepared to be honest and open and truthful with the people of the province, and I have a real problem with that—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I ask the member to withdraw.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you, Speaker.

I must say that is probably the most disappointing, that that would happen. So, Speaker—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Excuse me. I asked you to withdraw.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Sure, I withdraw. I thought I did.

I then appeal to this side of the assembly to start to think about the rest of this province, to start to think about good governance, because, heavens, we know for the past nine years we have not had that.

Thank you very much. It’s a real pleasure to be able to speak today.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Dufferin—Caledon.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Thank you, Speaker. It’s an honour to rise this morning on behalf of the residents of Dufferin—Caledon to respond to the speech from the throne.

In the lead-up to the House’s return last week, I found myself getting asked the same question over and over back in Dufferin—Caledon. Time and time again, I would be asked the same thing, something to the effect of, “So what will the government do now that it’s not prorogued and things are up and running again at Queen’s Park?” Each time, I would remind people that in actuality, the government has been up and running each and every single day since prorogation. I would remind them that the only thing former Premier McGuinty actually shut down on October 15 was the ability of the opposition to hold the government to account. In essence, the Legislature’s prorogation did not prevent the government from functioning. Quite the contrary, it simply spared it from functioning with oversight. If there’s one, single thing that has been proven time and time again, it’s that lack of oversight and the party opposite do not mix.

We’ve seen this most recently with the downright scandalous cancellation of two power plants at a cost of

what is expected to be \$1 billion, and all to save Liberal seats in the 2011 election. Speaker, it is the opposition that had to finally pull the Liberal government kicking and screaming into the light of accountability on these cancelled power plants.

When I’m out in the community in Dufferin—Caledon—like at the family skates I hosted in Bolton and Grand Valley—I consistently hear from local residents that they just cannot trust the Liberal government to get to the bottom of this scandal. You see, Dufferin—Caledon residents look at the facts, like how, with an election looming, the Liberal government pulled the plug on the Oakville power plant. Then, in a desperate and shameful attempt at a majority government, the Liberal campaign team, co-chaired by Premier Wynne, made the call to cancel the Mississauga plant to salvage yet more Liberal seats, and only six days before the 2011 vote. Following the election, the Liberal government then added insult to injury and stonewalled the opposition, and Ontarians, for months on end about the final costs of their cynical electoral scheme. Finally, in the face of all these scandals, and after being outright ordered to release all documents pertaining to the plants, the Liberal government then paraded its cabinet ministers out to this very chamber, one after another, to cry foul, vilify the opposition and adamantly swear that all the documents had been turned over. Yet, as we now know, this was not true, as there have now been two more documents dumps since that time.

You see, Speaker, Dufferin—Caledon residents look upon this continual fiasco in disgust because no respectable government would put its own electoral fortunes ahead of its sacred duty to safeguard the people’s tax dollars.

Among the many vague promises put forward in the throne speech was the notion that local populations will be more involved in projects in their communities. The speech from the throne argued that Ontario can benefit from things like industrial wind farms, “but only if we have willing hosts”—a direct quote from the speech from the throne.

Speaker, I have read countless petitions and letters, I’ve been to many meetings and I can tell you that none of the municipalities in Dufferin—Caledon that currently have industrial wind turbines feel that they were anything but forced upon them. Too often, community consultation is whatever wind power corporations and a handful of government bureaucrats say it is.

In Dufferin—Caledon, there’s the proposed phase 3 of the Grand Valley wind farms project, where the municipality has asked the company to stay outside of Grand Valley’s projected growth area. But the company didn’t listen, and it’s proposing tower locations within the growth area. Additionally, the company is proposing to build a transformer station directly across from a residential area.

We talk about Places to Grow and yet we have two government policies that are completely at odds against each other, and I can tell you which one is going to win:

It's the industrial wind turbines. Grand Valley Mayor John Oosterhof thinks that it's unacceptable; Grand Valley town council thinks that it's unacceptable. Would the Premier consider Grand Valley a "willing host," I wonder?

Then there's the case of the Dufferin Wind Power project, a massive proposal that proposes to run a 230-volt transmission line through Mulmur, Melancthon, Shelburne and Amaranth. Once again, an overwhelming majority of residents, and their duly elected representatives, are in unified opposition to this project. Are they "willing hosts"?

If the Premier truly believes in the "willing host" approach, she can first implement an immediate moratorium on wind turbines and, second, instruct her caucus to support Bill 2, which would return planning rights to municipalities, brought forward by my colleague from Simcoe-Grey. This would immediately prohibit these projects from being forced on the very unwilling host municipalities that are bearing the brunt of the Liberal government's misguided energy experiments.

But alas, there are no such concrete directions in this throne speech, only vague promises and even fewer details. The trouble is, with little or no details on how any of the many new promises will be kept, the speech provided no real "way" at all. As for "forward," well, Speaker, I can tell you that this speech may be proposing to move Ontario forward; it's just in the totally wrong direction.

For almost 10 years now, the Liberal government has taken Ontario deeper and deeper into debt with its reckless overspending. No program was too expensive, no taxpayer too taxed, and all the while Ontario families were promised everything under the sun. Often, these promises were broken. Often, these programs failed. Yet the Liberal government still claims that if it could only spend a few more billion dollars, if it could only add another dozen programs to the hundreds of thousands we already have, then somehow our economy will turn around and our troubles will ease away.

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In the throne speech, Premier Wynne and her government used the term "fair society." But what is this society that they call fair? I wonder if the mother whose two-year-old child, through no fault of her own, currently owes over \$15,000 as their portion of Ontario's debt would call that a fair society. Would the senior on a fixed income, who, thanks to the skyrocketing energy rates and the HST on home heating, now has the choice of heat, hydro, and food—pick two. Is that a fair society?

You see, whenever a government places a higher priority on its priorities as opposed to the people's, it's doomed to failure and deserves it. Over the past 10 years, the Liberal government's policies have let Ontario down time and time again, so instead of taking our province forward in the wrong direction, we are already heading there.

What Dufferin-Caledon families needed to hear last week was a throne speech that proposed bold changes in

a totally new direction. This is why it is so disappointing to see Premier Wynne squander this rare opportunity for bold change and instead choose to entrench the McGuinty legacy that brought us to the worst jobs-and-debt crisis in our lifetime. It is under this legacy that we have seen Ontario's energy rates soar from among the lowest in North America to the highest.

Recently, I visited a local steel manufacturer in Caledon with my colleague from Nipissing. We were there to discuss the effect of these crippling energy costs and what they have done to Ontario's manufacturing. He relayed to us a number of investments he had made in his company's infrastructure in an attempt to remain competitive while still affording the ever-increasing energy rates. After a lengthy discussion, my constituent sat back in his chair and concluded, "So in the end, I have no real control over my hydro bills because I have no real control over the changes the government has arbitrarily placed on my hydro bill." That, Speaker, in one sentence, says it all.

The policies of this government signal to entrepreneurs and job creators that if you put in that extra effort, if you make that extra investment, there's no guarantee in your return because the government increasingly reaps the reward of your efforts and investment.

Not so long ago, I got a call from a mayor in Dufferin county. He was calling to tell me a long-time manufacturing company in his town was going to announce they were closing shop. As part of the company's North American restructuring, they decided the facility in my riding had operating costs that were just too high—no longer competitive. Ninety men and women went home that day without a job. Ninety families started the next day with one less income to support themselves.

I believe that there was a real opportunity last week, with the speech from the throne, to change that direction. We didn't see it. As a result, I must not support this speech from the throne.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Questions and comments?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I think that when you look at the throne speech and you measure that and you weigh that against our responsibility in this Legislature—it is to listen and to learn from it, but also, people in this province want results and they want to see us working towards the common goals that we should all share, which are a strong education system, a strong health care system, an economy which actually meets the needs of people.

In particular, the home care mentioned has our attention. We have put out a five-day home care guarantee because that's what people have told us—families across the province have said, "We cannot cope with our aging seniors without the proper infrastructure."

I was knocking on doors last Friday just to get some feedback on our plan, and you would be amazed at the conditions that some seniors are living in in this province. We should be ashamed, actually. The supports are not there. These seniors need help with laundry. They

need help with groceries. Nutrition is an issue. They certainly need help with cleaning. You have only to knock on one of those doors and have a conversation to know that their needs are very real.

The very people that will be helping seniors in our proposed plan are personal support workers. The government has created a personal-support-worker registry without any criteria around the quality of those people. This is an issue that I'd like to raise with the government. It's an issue around quality; it's an issue around substance. Certainly, as time marches on, we are going to need those human resources, those personal care workers, to follow through on a plan. It is people that make the difference. Personal support workers are a key component of that. We have to make sure that those resources are there to ensure that this plan works.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: I want to comment on some of the comments that the two opposition speakers made with respect to the electricity sector. The Leader of the Opposition and the Tories announced in a white paper that the party would sell off Ontario Power Generation—OPG—and Hydro One. It's interesting to see that the Ontario PCs are going back to their failed approach to energy. Their failed attempt to privatize the electricity system in the late 1990s led to a sudden price shock; in only a few months, the price increased by 30%. The last time they tried to privatize, Leader of the Opposition Mr. Hudak's top advisers were at the trough. Well-connected Tory insiders received nearly \$6 million in untendered contracts from Hydro One. Tom Long, Hudak's co-campaign manager, made off with \$1.3 million in Hydro One contracts. The firm of the Leader of the Opposition's other co-campaign manager received \$250,000, which Mr. Hudak later called a—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Point of order. Yes?

Mr. John Yakabuski: It is against the rules of the House to refer to another member by name and not their riding or their role. I would ask the Minister of Energy to refrain from that and for you to hold him out of order, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Continue, but I would ask the member to respect that, the riding name instead of a personal name.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: They referred to the management of the electricity system, and so am I; they've issued a white paper, and so am I, Madam Speaker.

There was a well-known quote which was made in 2003 by the member from Aurora: "Well, there's one reason that we accumulated that debt"—which caused an increase in prices—"in this province under the hydro ledger, and that is that people in this province for years have not been paying the true cost"—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The time has expired.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Madam Speaker, we had an interruption. It used about 20 seconds of my time.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): No. Further comments?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you very much, Speaker. I, too, would like to comment on the speech from the throne and the comments that we received. Certainly, I would have to begin by reminding everybody in this Legislature that, under our former Premier and our current Premier, we have seen that energy rates have doubled in the province of Ontario in the last nine years. Let's make no mistake about that.

Specifically to the speech from the throne: I have agreed with the comments made by the member from Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke—where are you, John?—as well as our member from Nepean—Carleton. I was disturbed: In the 17 pages of the throne speech, I can read you the entire commitment to northern Ontario; it's one half of one sentence. Let me read you the one half of one sentence: "It will address the special transportation needs of Ontario's north and endeavour to improve vital access to the Ring of Fire," and then it goes on to the United States, access to the United States.

Northern Ontario, under the Liberal government, has been under siege. First of all, their "special transportation needs of Ontario's north" involve cancelling the Northlander and putting the Ontario Northland rail up for sale—something that our party says will never leave public hands. Ontario's north is under siege. We saw nine parks close in northern Ontario. In northwestern Ontario, we saw tourism centres close.

Speaker, this government does not understand anything north of Vaughan, and certainly this throne speech is insulting to northern Ontario with that one half of one sentence.

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The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Ms. Cindy Forster: Thank you to the members from Nepean—Carleton and Dufferin—Caledon for their comments.

I want to address my comments around the hydro rates issue that was bought up by the member from Dufferin—Caledon. I met yesterday, for most of the afternoon, with mayors in a number of municipalities from across this province, and hydro rates seem to be one of their huge concerns in their particular ridings. They told me that they can't attract any new business to their municipalities or into their riding areas because of the hydro rates. Their existing businesses are struggling. They're just kind of hanging on by a thread.

I know that in my own riding, we have a small steel mill that grew out of the closure of Slater Steel—a specialty steel company that has to operate during the night shift because the hydro rates during the day and evening shifts are too high for them to actually make any kind of a profit. If they happen to hit that peak hour, they actually have to close down their mills.

Not only businesses are struggling. We heard during the period of proration, as we visited communities

across this province, about the struggle that individual families are having trying to keep heat in their homes. It's been a particularly cold winter, and so they're struggling as well. We need to make sure that people are being looked after with respect to their heating bills and with respect to being able to have a life that's a little more affordable for them.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Dufferin–Caledon has two minutes to respond.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Thank you, Speaker.

The reason I raised some of these examples from Dufferin–Caledon is that, unfortunately, they are echoed across Ontario. Some 600,000 people are unemployed, and job creators are buried under mountains of regulations, red tape and taxes. We must reduce these obstacles to economic growth by cutting the reckless overspending of this government and starting to spend within our means.

It's clear that Dufferin–Caledon families cannot rely on this government to get Ontario out of the fiscal mess we are in, and that is unacceptable. It is unacceptable because every cent that we have to pay to service our massive, unsustainable debt is a cent that doesn't get invested in the services Dufferin–Caledon families care about—services like world-class education and health care.

I will be voting against this throne speech because I believe, Tim Hudak believes and Dufferin–Caledon residents and Ontario believe that we deserve better, we can do better and we need to do better.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: It's a pleasure to have this opportunity to speak on the throne speech. As I said yesterday in the couple of minutes that I had, the throne speech has a bit of everything for everyone: a little bit for the Tories, although they're not happy because they're not getting enough; a little bit for the NDP, and I'll speak to the issues that the government might be co-operating with us on, but we'll see; and a bit for the Liberals. It's a budget for everyone. And when it's a throne speech for everyone, my sense is that it's a throne speech for no one. That's the impression I get when throne speeches are not focused.

Contextually, it is a throne speech that is designed to be one that is fair for everyone, and the language that the Premier uses is that they want a fair society—which is impressive and it's good. That expression usually is a social democratic one, and it's nice to hear the Premier speaking in those terms. We're hoping she in fact, in the budget, moves in that direction rather than just speaking in that direction. But we'll see.

Historically, when you look at so many factors that speak to a fair society, I've got to tell you, the Liberals don't have an impressive record.

Now, to be fair, on the issue of a fair society and the Liberal record, much of it was started by the impressive regime that was led by Monsieur Harris—

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Who?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Monsieur Harris. You probably forgot his name, I'm sure. You're quite right. It's a good idea to forget him, for many reasons. But the decline in Ontario started under his Conservative leadership and has continued impressively by the Liberals in the last 10 years. God bless.

Let me outline a couple of things to show you how you are in a pickle as you speak about a fair society, because Ontario faces the largest increase in income inequality in Canada. The widest income disparities, of the top 20%, of the bottom 20%, are in Ontario and British Columbia. These are the top two provinces in terms of income disparity in the country—nothing to be proud of. When you've got these tremendous gaps of people who earn a hell of a lot at the high end and people at the bottom earning little, that they're struggling to survive in this fair society, you've got a little problem. And it's something that the Liberals have to face up to as part of the heritage that the Conservatives have laid the framework and the foundation for. So for people reflecting on coming back to a Conservative regime, I would look at them very carefully.

The poverty rate fell in five provinces in the last 20 or 25 years, but it has increased in the other five, and Ontario is at the high end of poverty rates. In fact, the poverty rate in 2009 was 13.1%, which speaks to about 1.6 million people being affected and facing poverty. That's a whole lot of people in Ontario. When you talk about child poverty, that rate is 14.6%. One in seven are poor in Ontario. So the context is a fair society—that's the direction the Premier wants to move in—and this is what we're dealing with. Liberals have aggravated an existing condition that had been begun by the Conservative regime before them. They have the worst record on affordable housing. There are 152,000 people waiting to get into affordable housing, assisted housing. And by the way, if you recall—because a lot of the younger Tories weren't here, except perhaps some who might have been pages at the time—Mike Harris did not build one assisted public housing, and that regime has continued under a Liberal regime over the last 10 years. So we have the worst record in affordable housing in Canada.

Interjections.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Speaker, don't you mind the little comments that come by here. I don't mind that. It doesn't bother me one single bit. You just let them shout out. I think it's good, and healthy in a democracy, in fact.

We have the poorest funding on public services in Canada, the poorest as it relates to health care, education, issues of justice, disability benefits. And by the way, user fees are increasing daily because we're shifting responsibilities away from corporate and income tax to user fees. Who do you think user fees affect mostly? Well, many in the northern communities that so many of the Tories are speaking to today—user fees began under that Conservative regime and continue in a healthy way under the Liberals. God bless. The hospitals are funded less than anywhere else in Canada and they have the fewest hospital beds per person of any province.

Ms. Cindy Forster: And they want to cut them more.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Well, they want to do some trade-offs. We'll cut this, we'll give here by offsetting it with cuts somewhere else. That's what the Liberals will do, no doubt. They've begun doing it.

By the way, as it relates to a fair society, we have the highest tuition fees in the country—proudly number 10.

Hon. Michael Coteau: Even with the 30%?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Yes. The young Liberal skipper there who just became a minister—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Rosie, you know what? I think if we just tax the corporations out of existence, we'd solve all of their problems.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: John, the Speaker is just going to shut you up in a second. You've got to be careful.

The highest—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Order. I would ask that the member make his remarks directed to the Chair and I would ask those to reduce the heckling so he's able to do so.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Thank you very much, Speaker, for taking my side. That was clearly an unbiased approach. Very good.

So we've got the highest tuition fees in the country, and the Liberals are proud to be number 10. Good for you.

The whole point of establishing and moving to a political direction of fairness—this is a good idea, because when I—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Talk about the deficit. You like deficits.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: John, sorry. If you keep going, the Speaker is really going to go after me. I can't have that.

I wanted to put that out for you so that you have a sense of the challenges that you, as Liberals, face.

I've got to tell you, we New Democrats are trying to make it better. We worked at it in the last budget. We tried to co-operate as best as we could. We asked you, "Please include a 2% surtax on those who are earning over \$500,000"—and I've got to tell you, the negotiations were tough. We understood that the former Premier didn't want to do it and we understood that there were a lot of people, including the former finance minister, who, I hear, didn't want to do it. But I know there were a lot of Liberals who really liked our idea of a 2% surtax on those who are making over \$500,000 because it was fair; it was fair. They finally caved in and said, "All right. We'll blame it on the New Democrats so that we will not be seen as attacking the wealthy in Ontario." But ultimately, they did.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: How much have you collected with that?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: How much? Well—

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Hold on, hold on. You're asking me a question. You can't keep talking when you're asking a question.

Our studies indicated that we would be collecting \$500 million; the government said \$400 million. That's a whole lot of money.

Now, if you close the tax loopholes, you'd probably get all of it, right? But you've got a whole lot of wealthy people, especially good Tories, who love not paying taxes, who love avoiding taxes. If they can avoid paying taxes, God bless, they're number one. They're right there.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I'm happy to pay my taxes. I just want them to be spent properly.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Absolutely. That's why I outlined the whole list of problems that we've got to get to a just society. And you're right: We've got to spend it properly; we can't just give it away. And we've been giving it away to corporations for the last 20 years. We can't just give it away.

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Wait, don't we have—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): We have come very close to the time to recess.

Debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): This House stands recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1014 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'm really excited to introduce a good friend of mine and also a councillor from Dawn-Euphemia, Maureen McCutcheon. Thanks for coming to the Legislature.

Ms. Soo Wong: I'd like to welcome Lucy Zhao, who is the mother of page Angela Wang, a student at Terry Fox Public School and a resident of the riding of Scarborough—Agincourt.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I think I'm going to beat the Attorney General to the punch, but I would like to introduce from Alberta the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, the Honourable Jonathan Denis. Welcome.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I'm pleased to introduce yet again Susan Gapka, a trans activist, to the House. Welcome, Susan.

Hon. John Gerretsen: I too would like to welcome Alberta's justice minister, the Honourable Jonathan Denis, in the Legislature today. We had a very, very productive and good meeting this morning, Speaker.

He's also joined by two very important people that he relies on on a day-to-day basis: his chief of staff, Mathew Steppan; and his press secretary, Josh Stewart. Welcome to Queen's Park to all of you.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd like to welcome to the Legislature today Mark Bain, our candidate from Kingston and the Islands in the next provincial election.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'd like to introduce two councillors from the municipality of French River here to visit us today: Mike Bigras and Mike Bouffard.

Mr. Jack MacLaren: I'd like to introduce Mrs. Connie Sellors. She is a former president of the Hamilton and District Pharmacists' Association, and she is the mother of my executive assistant, Chris Sellors.

Hon. Reza Moridi: It's my pleasure to introduce my good friend and the former MP Sarkis Assadourian.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I'd like to introduce the mother and father of page William Strathdee: Gloria and Al Strathdee; Andrea and Rachel Strathdee, his sisters; and Yasmin Veloso, who is an exchange student from Brazil. Welcome to the Legislature.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'd like to welcome a number of people from my riding. We have Mayor Dennis Fife from North Stormont; Lianne Acres, a councillor in North Stormont; Joanne Haley, who is a planner in South Glengarry; Gerry Boyce, the deputy mayor of North Dundas, and his wife, Lorna; Eric Duncan, mayor of North Dundas and deputy warden for SD&G, who will be the youngest warden next year in the history of SD&G. Welcome to the Legislature.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: It's my pleasure to welcome Gary Dyke, the chief administrative officer for the city of Quinte West. Welcome to Queen's Park. Also, Rick and Robin English, who are here at ROMA; Rick is retiring after 36 years of service.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Today I would like to recognize, with great sadness, the passing of Herb Epp, a former MPP from Kitchener-Waterloo. I had the chance to speak with Herb after the election in Kitchener-Waterloo, and he generously offered assistance and advice, and I thanked him for his dedication to public service. It was clear from our conversation how much he loved our community and how proud he was of Waterloo.

Herb Epp passed away at the age of 78 last night. A former MPP, three-term mayor of Waterloo, an alderman for Waterloo, Herb Epp was a dedicated public servant to the community of Kitchener-Waterloo and to the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank the member and recognize that as a point of order. I have asked the Clerk to contact the House leaders to continue the discussion and the dialogue on how to bring honour to those members who have passed away, to agree on a process, and that will shortly be taking place, in order that they do receive their just recognition in this House. I thank the members for that.

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: I'd like to introduce Sarkis Assadourian, former federal member for Brampton Centre.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, it's my pleasure to welcome students from Holy Name school in my riding. It's their first time in the Legislature. Be nice to them today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm always nice to the guests; I'm just hoping that everyone else will be.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO FARMERS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the part-time Minister of Agriculture and Food.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'd like to be on record for asking for it: Would the member please withdraw?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I withdraw.

I assume that now you've been briefed on the issues, although that wasn't evident in the answering of questions at ROMA this week.

The CSA will no longer be certifying grain dryers for farmers. Are you aware that without this certification, at the busiest time of the year, they will not be able to harvest and dry their crops?

For months, your predecessor dragged his heels on this issue. Since I assume you were briefed on this matter, what is your government going to do about it?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I want to just say off the top that I am very committed to taking on the role of Minister of Agriculture and Food.

I am clear, I have been clear, that it is a focus of this government and it's a priority of this government to make sure that the people in rural Ontario and the people who are involved in the agri-food industry understand how important it is that the agri-food business be thriving, that we put in place the supports that are necessary—a \$34-billion manufacturing industry. That is an economic driver of the province, and I'm going to be working with the agri-food community, with the agricultural community, to make sure that they have the supports that they need.

I am going to answer the question in the supplementary. I will be very clear about that, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Well, Premier, it's obvious from that answer on the first one that you haven't been briefed, or at least you don't understand it.

Premier, in our survey, some agribusinesses reported that they require 20 licences, certificates and permits just to operate their business. This crushing burden on agribusiness is drowning them in red tape. The PC Party believes that to create jobs, many could be combined or eliminated. I'm sure that you were briefed on this matter, Premier. Can you give me some examples of those that you think could not be eliminated or could be used and combined to make it a better system?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The member opposite knows that the current situation has arisen because, as he said, the CSA, the Canadian Standards Association, withdrew its national certification services and standards for grain dryers.

In fact, the provincial organization, the TSSA, has stepped in to fill the void, in an effort to ensure the public safety. Obviously, public safety is number one, so that's why the TSSA has stepped in, Mr. Speaker. The ministry

and TSSA understand that field approval is not a familiar process for farmers. They take their concerns about delays and costs seriously, and the TSSA is open to hearing from stakeholders. We are in the process of getting—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I would ask the member to withdraw that.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Withdraw.

She spreads it too.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I would ask the member to withdraw that too.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Withdraw.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order, please. As I've told all members, I'm racing to the top, not the bottom.

Final supplementary.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I guess we're going to have to put up with the answer to the question being the one from before, because it takes that long for the briefing notes to come in. I think it makes my case.

Premier, it's clear that you were not briefed on these issues. You had to wait for the briefing here.

You claim that you are willing to work with the opposition. But more than two weeks ago, I wrote and asked for a meeting on agriculture issues, to have a meeting with you to discuss them. Your office hasn't even bothered to call me to try and set up a time.

Premier, I have a large stack of emails from farmers who want a full-time Minister of Agriculture and Food. As a part-time Minister of Agriculture and Food, do you just not have enough time to do the job or don't you want to work with us in the opposition?

1040

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: First of all, I want to apologize to the member opposite for not having been able to set up a meeting with you yet. It has been a very busy couple of weeks on this side of the House.

I have been meeting with agriculture stakeholders. I have been listening to the community. I have been paying very close attention to the concerns. You know, one of the issues that has been raised with me is about the Open for Business, and farmers making sure that we are paying attention to their concerns around regulation and making sure that we put the supports in place.

However, Mr. Speaker, I apologize. I would be very happy to meet with the member opposite. My staff, I know, are hearing this conversation and they'll be getting back to the member to set up an opportunity for us to meet.

TEACHERS' COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Back to the Premier: When you forgot to swear in as Minister of Agriculture and Food, your basic instinct was a second swearing-in. Your basic instinct was to keep the power plant documents secret, and now we see you keeping secret your backroom deal with OSSTF. You have been Premier for less than two

weeks, and already we have three examples of her keeping secrets from the people of Ontario—shameful.

Will you stand up today and tell Ontario taxpayers, parents and their students how much you've decided to hand over to the teachers' union as part of a backroom deal that you're not prepared to talk about? We want to know. Please, let us know.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: There is no new money. There is no new money as part of the conversations with the teacher leadership. I've been clear about that.

What I have said is that we need a new process going forward, and that is exactly what's being talked about: How do we have a collective bargaining process in place that recognizes the role of the provincial government as the funder of the publicly funded education system, and how do we have a local process in place? None of the conversations at the table have anything to do with new money.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: This Premier is either incredibly naive or she thinks the people of this province are naive. No one believes you.

Look, the government says it wants to return things to the way it was. So this is what Ontario parents and students hear: that we're either going to go back to strikes or you're going to hand over more money to the unions. Which is it? We would like to know.

We already know that OSSTF is claiming victory for having the resignation of Dalton McGuinty; we know OSSTF is claiming victory for the NDP by-election win; and we know that OSSTF is taking claim and credit for the demotion of the former Minister of Education. What more are we going to find out in secret, leaked, confidential memos from OSSTF, or can you just tell us right here, in this chamber, with the media watching? The public's eyes are on you, Premier. Why don't you tell the truth?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: What this conversation is about is a grade 11 student who wants to play volleyball. It's about a grade 10 student who wants to be part of an orchestra. It's about a teacher or a member of the support staff who wants to coach track. It should not be about adults who are having problems having a good, respectful relationship.

What I want is that respectful relationship. I want that conversation, which is why, after I was selected leader, I reached out to the leadership of the federations and I said, "Let's get back to the conversation. Let's go back to having a respectful dialogue." That's what we've done.

It is almost as though the member opposite would rather have conflict. It's almost as though the member opposite does not want any kind of respectful conversation with the employees of this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: If the Premier wants to talk about volleyball, I'll tell her, her serve didn't clear the net.

It's incredibly naive for her to tell Ontario families that there is no secret deal when we know that there is one. She's had secret meetings with the union. They all

of a sudden, after declaring victory on destroying her party, have now come out and given her \$10,000, and we're to expect that they're getting nothing in return? That's a joke.

Ontario students deserve better. This Premier is not interested in doing anything for Ontario students. We already know Ken Coran has said that many of his teachers will not go back to extracurriculars. We know it's too early for you to be patting yourself on the back. We already know that some of these students are going out to get extracurricular activities.

So I ask you again: Are you prepared to come clean with Ontario families and tell us what's in store? Is it more money? Are you stripping EQAO? Are you going to make sure that your union buddies get big payouts a couple of years from now? We want details, Premier, and I think you can give them to me.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I'm not tall, but I'm right at the net, and that ball is going right back.

This is honestly about making sure that we have a good working relationship with the teachers and the support staff of this province—all of them. I'm here in this Legislature because I worked hard on publicly funded education in the late 1990s, when the relationship was in tatters. I believe that schools work better, that kids learn better when there's a working relationship, a constructive relationship between government, school boards, the teachers and the support staff. That's why I called the leadership and that's why we've been having a respectful discussion.

There's no more money; there is a conversation that is going to restore extracurriculars in the province.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock.

I try my best to keep on time and to make things work as well as they do. These kinds of things do not help, nor does it help to try to tell me how to do my job.

The leader of the third party.

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. In recent days, the Premier has talked about delivering change. But beyond promises, she's actually dismissing some pretty good ideas. For example, the Premier dismissed the idea of an affordable public inquiry into the gas plant scandals. Will the Premier clarify now whether she's also dismissing a real plan to get young people back to work?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I apologize; I didn't hear the last sentence in that remark—

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's about getting young people to work.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —so I will just answer the first part, which is that we've been very clear about getting the information that the committee asked for into the hands of the committee members.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to say to the leader of the third party that I am very interested in working with her

on making sure that we put in place the supports that help young people get into work. I've said that the mismatch between the labour market and the labour force is of great concern to me and that we need a more systematic way to help young people get exposure to a whole range of occupations. That is one of the areas that I very much would like to work with her on.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, in a recent letter to Liberal donors, the Premier wrote that New Democrats would “rather [have] an inquiry than implement the recommendations of the Lankin-Sheikh report.” It’s unfortunate, because we’ve actually put forward a concrete proposal that will allow people to keep money as they transition to work. It’s a recommendation that comes directly from that report.

But we also want to get to the bottom of the gas plant scandal. Does the Premier really believe that these are mutually exclusive goals?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I really believe that the leader of the third party does want to work on implementing the Lankin-Sheikh report. It's something that she and I have talked about and it's something that I want to work on. What we can't do—and I've been clear—is put \$20 million to \$25 million into a public inquiry. I've been very clear about that.

I want to work on the recommendations of the Lankin-Sheikh report. The issue around youth unemployment is a huge concern to me. In fact, in the jobs roundtables that I've already had, this is an issue that has come forward. I believe that labour, government and the private sector need to be working together to find ways to systematically allow young people to have opportunities to discover a whole range of occupations.

1050

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, with all due respect, what we can't do is talk out of both sides of our mouth. The Premier has been making a lot of grand pronouncements, but Ontarians got a lot of that from the previous—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That's not a phrase that has been accepted in the House. I would ask the member to withdraw.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I'll withdraw, Speaker.

The Premier has been making a lot of grand pronouncements, but Ontarians got a lot of the same kinds of pronouncements from the last Liberal Premier in this Legislature. They need to know that promises are actually going to result in some real change, not endless conversation and not political blame games.

Will the Premier agree that creating jobs and getting people back to work are going to take a little less conversation and a little more action?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Actually, Mr. Speaker, it's going to take both. It's going to take conversation with all of the people who can be part of those solutions, and it's going to take action.

I absolutely accept that we need to take action on that front, and that's why the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment is putting together a plan so that we can, as we move into the budget, have those pieces in place that will allow us, as I say, in a systemic way to work with labour, to work with the private sector, to work with the college and university sector, to work with our school boards—because there are things that we can do in collaboration with all of those groups to make sure that we have better access for young people into the job market.

I am absolutely ready and wanting to take action, but there does need to be a conversation so we make the right decisions.

POWER PLANTS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is to the Premier. Ontarians deserve answers about how much money was wasted on the gas plants and why that money isn't available now to create jobs or invest in health care. Will the Premier agree to move this issue out of the Legislature by sending it to an open, transparent and affordable public inquiry so MPPs can get on with the business of putting families first?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Again, in the interest of cross-party co-operation, I think the best answer to the leader of the NDP's question comes from the MPP for Cambridge, who on January 30 said, "The cost of a public inquiry is excessive. We don't believe that that's necessary. We're paid as individuals to represent our constituents and to hold the government, and that's where we expect this hearing to take place, and we're calling on the incoming Premier to call a legislative committee immediately."

Mr. Speaker, I think it was put very well by the member. It's too expensive. We have a committee of the Legislature which is seized with this issue, and we look forward, on this side of the House, to co-operating fully with its work.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, the Conservative member from Cambridge really doesn't interest me in terms of his opinion. New Democrats think we need to make sure that the public inquiry takes place so that we can get to the bottom of the gas plants scandal.

The Premier should know that getting to the bottom of that scandal is extremely important, and it's not as simple as calling up the AG. His mandate does not allow him to look at who made the decisions to not let the information come out—in other words, who ordered the cover-up. It's not that simple.

Talking about getting answers isn't actually the same thing as getting the answers. Will the Premier agree that Ontarians deserve the answers and that they will be able to get those answers by calling an independent public inquiry?

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, it's a little strange that the leader of the New Democratic Party criticizes her friend the MPP for Cambridge when in fact she and the PCs came together to vote for a motion which, at its core, is vindictive against a former member of the Legislature, who is back in private life right now, and decided not to go down the route that we had proposed of having a select committee.

But again, Mr. Speaker, we will co-operate with the committee. We look forward to the answers that they will bring forward. We also look forward to hearing from the New Democratic Party about their opposition to the power plants. We look forward to them coming forward and tabling with the committee their policy analysis and their spending. Obviously, Mr. Speaker, since this seems to trump in their minds most other issues that are on the minds of Ontarians, we know that they did careful work before they opposed the power plants. We look forward to hearing about it from them at the committee.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, it's very disappointing to see the vindictive misrepresentation of New Democrats' positions when it comes to the power plants in this scandal—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): As I've indicated to you, I'm trying to race to the top, and I think that that expression to the member was inappropriate. Withdraw.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): "Misrepresentation."

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I normally don't respond to that, and I'm not going to, so stop. I have asked the member to withdraw.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I did.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I was too engaged with the other members' heckling. Shall I hear it again?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I withdraw, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Carry on, please.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, it's unfortunate that the Liberals aren't doing their research in terms of the positions the New Democrats took when it came to the power plants. I invite both the Premier and her House leader to do so, so that they can be clear in this Legislature in terms of the history of this matter.

But I'm concerned that there's a lot of talk about action instead of any real action being taken here. The Premier is letting this place become bogged down by Liberal scandals. Instead of getting to answers for Ontarians, the Premier keeps refusing our constructive solutions.

Will the Premier agree to send this issue to a transparent and affordable public inquiry so that Ontarians can get the answers they need and MPPs can focus—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I'll do some research right here on the floor of the House. Inside Halton, October 7, 2010, the member for Toronto Danforth: "I

don't agree with the Oakville power plant; I don't think it's necessary."

The leader of the third party in this very Legislature, October 18, 2010: "New Democrats actually have thought for a long time that that plant should never have been built and we've said so."

The member for Beaches-East York, December 2, 2010, in Hansard: "I'm glad that the people of Oakville came to their senses. I'm glad the people of Oakville hired Erin Brockovich and did all the things that they did in order to have this killed."

Mr. Speaker, if the leader of the NDP is so opposed to the process that is being undertaken by the Legislature, why did she and her members stand in this place and go with the opposition on a mean-spirited, vindictive motion which is aimed at an honourable individual who is now a private citizen? Why won't she answer that question?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek, come to order, please.

New question.

TEACHERS

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: My question is to the Minister of Education. As a former teacher, I can appreciate the importance of extracurricular activities. They are instrumental in character-building and fostering leadership skills. This is why students and parents should not be used as pawns in labour negotiations.

I find it odd that when it comes to unions enforcing political action upon their members, they're left with no choice but to toe the union line or face sanctions and fines. Yet when the union bosses tell the members to resume extracurricular activities, it's considered voluntary and teachers can refuse. Once again, students are the ones who suffer.

Minister, you've chosen bigger donations over students. Will you stand up, put students first and support our motion to restore extracurricular activities immediately?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.

Minister of Education.

Hon. Liz Sandals: I think we have a different approach to working with our teachers. We believe that what we need to do is calmly and carefully rebuild the relationship. We believe that by working together, we can work with the people who are, after all, our front-line professionals. Speaker, that was something that the previous Harris government never understood: Teachers are the professionals in our schools who make our schools work. We know that they want to work with their students to help them succeed. They want to do all those extra things in schools that make schools a positive, caring place. We expect that they will be coming back to extracurricular activities because we're working together.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

1100

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Parents, principals and teachers understand that some teachers are simply better than others when it comes to fostering learning. The PC Party demands that the best qualified teacher is considered for the job, not the teacher who has been in the union the longest. A recent Fraser Institute report concluded 30% of GTA schools scored below the provincial average. Hiring teachers based on seniority rather than merit does not result in the best people teaching our children.

Will you support the PC motion to remove regulation 274/12 so the most qualified teachers are teaching our students? Minister, ensure the best teachers are hired.

Hon. Liz Sandals: We actually agree with something that was said here. We want the teachers who are hired to be high quality and to be able to do work in the classroom. But we also need a fair and open and transparent hiring process. We want to ensure that when there's an opening in a school, the job gets posted. We want to ensure that as teachers move from the occasional list, where they might be doing one or two days, onto the long-term occasional list, where they might be doing a month or so, that in fact we're looking at that experience, and that principals are evaluating that experience and that the people on our LTO lists are teachers who can deliver high quality. We think it's only fair those teachers who have proven their records in long-term occasional practice have an opportunity to go—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

New question? The member from Nickel Belt.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée.

Yesterday, the Ontario Health Coalition was at Queen's Park. They were sounding the alarm on the drastic hospital cuts occurring in Windsor, London, Niagara, Ottawa and dozens of other communities. These communities are facing deep cuts to hospital services and the care is not being replaced in the community. Can the minister explain why she said yesterday that these cuts are okay with her?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: As we discussed yesterday, the health care system is in transformation mode. We are moving services from hospitals to communities. We're supporting more people at home, where they want to be. This does mean that the health care system has to change in order to support increased investments in the community sector, in the home care sector; things like home care but also things like day programs for people with Alzheimer's, transportation programs and so on.

We did have to make some difficult decisions, Speaker. One of those decisions is we're holding hospital base increases at zero per cent. That means every hospital in the province is making some tough decisions. The decisions, though, will protect patient care, and I think, if it's better for patients, it should be better for all of us.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mme France Gélinas: It seems like the minister is implying that the only way we can increase capacity in home care, in the community care sector: is by cutting hospital services and programs. Yet she seems to want to completely ignore proposals like ours, proposals like Don Drummond's report, to find administrative savings in the LHINs, in the CCACs.

Will the minister please explain to those communities that are losing possible services and programs—explain to those health care workers who are being laid off—why she prefers to cut hospital services over administrative budgets?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: In fact, there is no hospital expenditure that has not been examined very, very carefully, and there are changes being made at all levels of hospital care. But Speaker, if we can support someone at home instead of keeping them unnecessarily in the hospital, that's the right decision to make. I'm not alone when I support our transformation.

I have some quotes that I would love to share. Mary Egberts, president and CEO of Quinte Health Care, says: "It's the right thing to do. This is going to be better for the patient...I have to commend the government." Mark Rochon, when he was interim president of the Ontario Hospital Association, said, "The government has very clearly signalled that it has rejected harmful, across-the-board cuts to health care funding, and that it intends to move forward quickly and responsibly with implementing its action plan for health care." These are the right decisions in our health care system—far, far preferable to the deep cuts that would result if the PC Party ever had their way.

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I've got a question this morning for the Minister of Research and Innovation. Investing in research and innovation is important to the continued economic strength of our province. Ontario, we all know, has some of the world's best entrepreneurs, researchers and innovators. It's through our investments and research that our highly skilled workforce is able to take those innovative ideas and those discoveries right through to their commercialization stage.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the Minister of Research and Innovation, would the minister please let us know what is being done right now to support research and innovation in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Reza Moridi: I would like to thank the member from Oakville for his question. Research and innovation are key drivers in our economy, and our government understands that very well. That's why we came out with the Ontario innovation agenda in the year 2008. The innovation agenda outlines our commitment to research and innovation and fostering the culture of research and innovation in the province of Ontario. Since the year 2003, we have invested \$3.6 billion in research and innovation in this province. This is twice the money the Conservatives invested when they were in office.

Through these investments, we have created 30,000 new jobs, we have trained 10,000 researchers and we have established world-class research institutions such as the Ontario Institute for Cancer Research and the Ontario Brain Institute. That's why our province has become one of the leading jurisdictions for research and innovation in the world.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: These are all important achievements and it's clear, I think, to most of us in this chamber that these investments have produced world-class research, they've helped grow our research and academic institutions, and of course they create jobs. We can see the tangible effects of these investments right around this building, near Queen's Park, when we look at the MaRS building across the street. Down University Avenue, we've got some of the country's leading hospitals. But we know these benefits aren't contained just to Toronto, just to urban centres; they stretch all across this province.

Speaker, through you back to the Minister of Research and Innovation, would the minister highlight how our investments in research and innovation benefit the province of Ontario as a whole?

Hon. Reza Moridi: Thank you again for the question. Our investments in research and innovation are driving our knowledge-based economy. For example, let's take a look at the ICT clusters around the GTA, Ottawa and Kitchener-Waterloo: These clusters are contributing \$28 billion to our economy every year and employing 270,000 people. We can take a look at the life sciences cluster, which is employing 38,000 people and contributing \$9.1 billion to our economy through over 1,000 companies.

Our private sector partners in Ontario have confidence in our province, and our commitment to research and innovation plays no small role in that area. We are committed to investing in research and development to grow our economy and create jobs in the province of Ontario.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Victor Fedeli: My question is for the Premier. Speaker, I'd ask a page to send over to the Premier some of the cabinet documents, Project Vapour documents, from the Oakville gas plant. These documents date back to July and August of 2011.

Let me refresh your memory with some of the phrases from these documents: "Coming out of Project Vapour"; "Attached are the Vapour minutes"; "Just spoke to Livingston on Vapour"; "Vapour is interesting"; "Subject: re: Vapour"; and they go on and on. That's a lot of cabinet discussion on Project Vapour back in 2011. Premier, will you acknowledge that you heard of Project Vapour in 2011?

1110

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the Minister of Energy, Mr. Speaker.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Halton, come to order. When I say “quiet,” I don’t want any rebuttal.

Minister of Energy?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Thank you for the question. First of all, I want to say that the critic for the opposition and I had a very nice meeting and discussion, and we look forward to working together, as we did with the NDP critic.

Thank you for the question. The member would know that this Legislature agreed to refer all the document issues to the justice committee. That committee, as I understand it, is going to start its deliberations.

The Premier has been open and forthright. She is willing to come to the committee. She’s willing to answer any questions, under oath, in as open and as transparent a way as possible. So I would say to the critic, next week you’ll have your opportunity to ask anybody from this side to go in and answer questions.

The documents that he is referring to, Mr. Speaker—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Back to the Premier: On September 25, as I said yesterday, you stood in this House and said, “All of the documents that have been released are the documents that were available.” However, we now see that you and your cabinet saw these Project Vapour documents over a year earlier, and you knew there were no Project Vapour documents released when you stood up and proclaimed, “You have all the documents.”

Premier, your credibility is running on fumes. Set the record straight. Why did you tell us we had all the documents when you absolutely and irrefutably knew we did not have those documents?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.

Minister of Energy.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: As everyone in this House will know, last week, I announced that there were some additional documents that came to my attention. On that day, I asked the chair and the president or CEO of the Ontario Power Authority to make themselves available in an open and transparent manner in the media studio. They had an hour to answer questions, and one of the questions went to the chair: “The opposition has accused the government today of a cover-up. Would you say that it is an accurate assessment of what has happened here?” The chair of the OPA said, “We messed up some search terms, and we were trying to get them cleaned up. So I’m not sure what this has to do with the government. This is all about us. That’s my answer to you.”

CASINOS

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My question is to the Premier. The Premier has repeatedly said that she wants to create a new relationship and to start listening to the people of Ontario but, in reality, she’s not listening to communities like Hamilton, Kingston and Toronto when they say they want a chance to decide if they want casinos. Despite

these concerns, the OLG is moving full steam ahead with privatizing gambling without giving communities an opportunity to have their own say.

Will the Premier start to really listen and do the right thing, which is to stop the privatization of the OLG and give Ontarians a choice and a chance to vote on whether they want casinos in their communities?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know that the Minister of Finance will want to comment on this, but I will just say, Mr. Speaker, I’ve been very clear that municipalities have the authority and the autonomy to decide whether they want to have casinos or not.

As a government, we will not be imposing those casinos on a municipality. It is up to the municipality to decide how it wants to consult with its constituency, with people of the jurisdiction. It’s up to them. They can have a referendum, they can do other consultation, but they are going to make the decision. The provincial government is not going to decide whether a casino is located in a particular municipality. That is up to the community.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Premier, the OLG plan to privatize is having an adverse effect on people in urban and rural Ontario. The cancellation of the slots-at-racetracks partnership caused a 50% reduction in sales at last year’s yearling auction, which has crippled a once world-class breeding industry.

The transitional panel report stated in black and white that about 20,000 to 30,000 people work full-time in the horse racing industry, and many of these jobs will be lost.

Can the Premier tell us why she’s so determined to push casinos on communities that don’t want them and take jobs and investments away from communities that desperately need them?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The premise of both these questions is wrong; both premises are wrong.

The first premise is that the province is going to force municipalities to take casinos. That’s just not true; we’re not doing that. The second premise is that—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. Stop the clock.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It’s not helpful when a member from the party that’s asking the question is heckling while I’m trying to get quiet, and I actually stop the clock.

Now, before I move on, I do want to make a comment about that: First and foremost, I am doing my utmost—and as I said, I’m racing to the top—to bring decorum into the place, but it can’t be done unless you’re with me. I’m asking you: Please come with me.

When a question gets asked from the opposition, it tends to get relatively quiet, but as soon as the answer is given, we then end up with the shouting—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): And I don’t need anyone making editorial comments while I’m speaking either.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The second premise, that somehow we don't want to have a sustainable horse racing industry, is also wrong. I've been very clear that the transition panel report is going to be the guideline for our changes in the horse racing industry. We have committed to a sustainable horse racing industry. It won't be exactly the same horse racing industry, but we're in negotiations with the racetracks right now. We want to have a sustainable industry. It will be changed, but it will be sustainable.

WINTER HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE

Mr. Steven Del Duca: My question today is for the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. We have had many winter storms already this year, and forecasts suggest that both in my riding and across the province there are more to come, including one, potentially, this evening and tomorrow.

I know that our government makes every effort to keep our roads safe. However, there are concerns in my riding of Vaughan that, in recent years, standards for snow removal have declined. Can the minister please update the House on our road maintenance standards?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: It's my great pleasure to report to the House, as they may know, that Ontario has the safest roads in North America. When you actually look at our environment—Northern Ontario—and the challenges we have, that is really an extraordinary accomplishment, given that the more temperate climes to the south, which should naturally have safer roads, don't. That is a testament to the incredible work of our municipalities, those that are at the Rural Ontario Municipal Association; the great work of the Ontario Good Roads Association; this government and, quite frankly, governments previously. We have shared this legacy of building excellent roads.

I know the member from Vaughan is working to ensure the 427 is extended and that the roads and highways to Vaughan meet the commercial and economic needs of his community, and we continue that tradition.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Steven Del Duca: I thank the minister for that important update. It is certainly good to know that Ontario does have the safest roads in North America and that our standards remain at the highest level.

Minister, I have certainly heard from my constituents in Vaughan that roads do seem to be closed more often in recent years when storms hit. Can you please inform the House as to the process for road closures and the role the government plays in assisting the police to keep our roads safe?

1120

Hon. Glen R. Murray: We have maintained two things consistently. One, we have maintained the same standards of snow removal, and we have never politicized road closures. It is up to the Ontario Provincial Police to make those decisions, and I think we want to keep it that way.

Mr. Speaker, you suggested that we take a race to the top, not a race to the bottom. Right now I want to thank a few members of the opposition: the members for Perth-Wellington, Wellington-Halton Hills, Algoma-Manitoulin and Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound. The reason I want to thank them is because they have shown up with their municipal delegations at the Ontario Good Roads Association and they have set aside partisan politics to work with me as minister to continue road safety. I want to thank those members opposite, and I want to continue: that each member opposite will feel welcome in any delegations I am receiving. It would be very helpful if they were there. Thank you very much to the members opposite.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Michael Harris: My question is to the Premier. Premier, Ontarians have been shocked and disgusted to see that the Liberals will stop at nothing to shut down a proper investigation into the power plant scandal. In the first and most pathetic display, the Liberal government prorogued Parliament just one day before the finance committee was set to begin its investigation. Then, on just the second day of the new session, the Premier broke her promise to establish a select committee to examine all aspects of the gas plant cancellations. Speaker, within just moments of our announcement, the Premier rejected our calls for a judicial inquiry.

Premier, I have to ask, with this much stonewalling, why should Ontarians believe a word you say?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the government House leader, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, we have a—
Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Yesterday I might not have been clear; I am now. To the two members who keep using that same term over and over again, it stops.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, we have a committee of this Legislature seized with this matter, based upon a motion that was brought forward by the member's own party, in fact the member's own colleague, who argued vehemently against the type of review that he's calling for right now.

I think on this side of the House we're all looking forward to hearing from the Progressive Conservatives about their opposition to the plant, about the work that they did in terms of policy analysis and costing. Again, I have the quotes: "We don't support building it"—Tim Hudak, London Free Press. Here is a statement by Geoff Janoscik in a PC press release: "The only way to guarantee this power plant does not get built is to elect a Tim Hudak Ontario government. A Tim Hudak government will cancel this plant." I have Twitter, Mr. Speaker—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Harris: Again to the Premier: After hearing answers like that, I think it's quite clear that nobody believes this government is any different, not even the member for Kitchener Centre, whose only sense

of renewal has been to flip from one page to the next in the McGuinty talking points manual. Ontarians are sick and tired of stall tactics and obstruction. They want a government that's open, transparent and accountable, not a government that's willing to throw its own members under the bus to keep Ontarians in the dark.

Premier, will you keep your promise and immediately establish a select committee to investigate your government's billion-dollar gas plant scandal, or will you follow in the footsteps of your predecessor and sacrifice another one of your colleagues just to hide the truth from Ontarians?

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, let me share a new one with you. We've got YouTube now. I hope members will tune in; it's a wonderful clip. The Leader of the Opposition, the day before the election, is touring the Mississauga gas plant with the PC candidates and other adoring fans. He outlines how, if he's elected as Premier, he'll cancel it. Queen's Park's own Richard Brennan points to the site in YouTube and he says, "If you get in, is that done?" The Leader of the Opposition responds, "That's right, done." Mr. Brennan asks, "Done, done?" and then the Leader of the Opposition responds, to thunderous applause, "Done, done, done."

Mr. Speaker, I suggest all members should review it. It's YouTube. It's called Hudak's Power Plant Promise: Done done, available on YouTube to everyone in this Legislature, to show their opposition to the—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment. Communities like London continue to struggle with high unemployment, companies shutting down and economic uncertainty. When will the people of southwestern Ontario start to see the money from the Southwestern Ontario Development Fund make a difference in their communities?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'd like to thank the member opposite for this question. In fact, yesterday at ROMA, at the meetings, I had a number of meetings with delegations from southwestern Ontario. It's remarkable just how much enthusiasm there is for this fund, which of course was proclaimed through passage in this Legislature and by the Lieutenant Governor just last October.

Even though it's just been several months, this fund, we've invested \$1.5 million so far, which in fact, importantly, has leveraged an additional \$10.1 million in investments. It is early days, as applications are just coming in, but certainly we're very confident that, as we've seen with the Eastern Ontario Development Fund and the success in leveraging literally hundreds of millions of dollars, the situation in southwestern Ontario will be identical.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Back to the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment: The development fund received a lot of attention when it was announced, but here we are, merely two months into 2013, and the board that would actually approve grants from the fund still hasn't been established.

When will the development fund corporation be established? When will people be appointed to the board?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Of course, my ministry officials are working diligently on this.

I wanted to mention one of the projects that has been funded already, despite that this is still early days for the fund. As I mentioned, it's only been in existence for several months. We're receiving quite a number of applications, of course, but we're proud to say that Lambton Conveyer, which of course is in Lambton-Kent-Middlesex—the local business owners are very happy to see a new partner there which is funded through Lambton Conveyer. They are actually doubling the size of their manufacturing plant and doubling its workforce as well by hiring 110 new workers. This is in Wallaceburg, in the heart of Lambton-Kent-Middlesex. I'm sure the member opposite will join me in expressing appreciation for this investment and for the hard work of the local officials.

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Mrs. Laura Albanese: My question is for the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment. My riding of York South-Weston is home to a lot of young people who are struggling—struggling to find work, to get a job, to get experience; struggling to stay out of trouble in many cases; and struggling to develop their skills for better opportunities for their futures.

There has been plenty of coverage since the speech from the throne indicating that youth employment is one of our government's priorities. Through you, Mr. Speaker, to the minister: What actions are we taking to ensure that young people across Ontario can find valuable work placements in co-ops and other opportunities that help them prepare for future careers? Can the minister please outline what actions we've taken already to address this issue?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Of course, my colleague is correct in indicating that this is a top priority for this government. It's quite remarkable. We've had three jobs roundtables so far: one here in Toronto, I convened one with the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce, and the Premier was in Ottawa last week as well with a jobs roundtable. It's remarkable how much of the conversation was directed at our young people and employment opportunities, the importance of effectively addressing this issue, and also supporting our young entrepreneurs so that they can find opportunities.

We know that the youth unemployment rate is far too high here in Ontario—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek, come to order.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: It's also a situation in Canada and around the world. The unemployment rate is roughly double what the average unemployment rate is. But we're doing a lot of work to address this already. Our summer jobs program has already helped to create more than 100,000 jobs for young people, including our Summer Company Program and Experiential Learning Program.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I'm encouraged by the fact that this is a priority for our government. I look forward to the opportunity to ensure that it stays on the agenda.

The minister made mention of some programs that are already in place for our youth living in Ontario to begin developing those skills and to make those connections that are needed to get that important job experience. Speaker, through you: Can the minister please provide some details on some of the programs that he just mentioned, such as the Summer Company and the Canadian Youth Business Foundation?

1130

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Again, with youth unemployment, I'm confident that this is an issue that all parties are going to want to get behind. I'm actually quite excited that the NDP has been speaking quite vigorously about this issue, and I look forward to working with them and with the Progressive Conservatives as well.

Ontario's Summer Company Program is actually in its 13th year and it provides young entrepreneurs with the chance to start their own business. It provides mentoring and up to \$3,000 in support from the government.

The Experiential Learning Program that I referenced also works with our Ontario Centres of Excellence to help post-secondary institutions foster students with innovative ideas into creating new products and businesses.

Our partnership with the Canadian Youth Business Foundation will provide \$4 million over just two years to help create nearly 2,000 jobs, Mr. Speaker, and 400 new businesses for young people.

We look forward to working with all the parties in this House, all sides, on how we can further improve the job market for our young people.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Rod Jackson: My question is to the Premier. The McGuinty-Wynne government has produced the largest scandal in Ontario history. The campaign decision to cancel the gas plants to save two Liberal seats has cost the hard-working families of Ontario \$1.3 billion, but it's also cost your government its credibility. Political interference has obstructed access to thousands of cancellation documents resulting in no less than three document dumps. The OPA's CEO claims that they didn't have the searches right the first times.

This abuse of public office is further reflected in the Premier's apparent lack of will to get to the bottom of this debacle. Premier, will you commit to calling for the select committee you promised this House and do it immediately?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the government House leader, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. James J. Bradley: The Tories are all over the map on this.

Hon. John Milloy: Again, Mr. Speaker, as my friend the Minister of the Environment says, the Tories are all over the map on this. The fact of the matter is that they moved forward with the motion that was brought forward by the member from Cambridge, and they decided to go that route—a motion which quite frankly, particularly in light of the fact that the former Minister of Energy has now left public life, is nothing more than mean-spirited and vindictive.

That being said, Mr. Speaker, our side of the House will co-operate fully with the committee. The Premier has given her personal assurances about appearances before the committee. I think it's about time that we let the committee start to undertake its work.

As I've said a number of times today, we are looking forward to hearing from the Conservatives about their plans to cancel the plants, about their costing, about their policy analysis on an issue which obviously they feel is top of the public's agenda.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Rod Jackson: Speaker, I'm also a mediator and I know one thing: Mediators don't punt their problems off to other people for resolution.

The question is for the Premier, not for the House leader. It's getting to be less Groundhog Day and more Looney Tunes. I see your lips moving, but I don't hear anything coming out.

The McGuinty-Wynne duo is responsible for the gas plant cancellations and the perpetually lost documents. Together, they were campaign chair and candidate; together, they sat at the cabinet table for the last decade; together, they weathered the OLG scandal, the eHealth scandal, the Ornge scandal and now the gas plant scandal.

The Premier will have you believe that there's a new government now that she shuffled her B team into their cabinet positions, yet the same minister that the McGuinty-Wynne team didn't believe could win his own seat was rewarded with the promotion of his lifetime—Minister of Finance—despite the fact he directly benefited from tax dollars. It looks like she's not getting it right the first times either, but it's not too late. That's why I want to know, Premier, will you deliver the promised select committee so Ontarians, who are on the hook for \$1.3 billion, can finally get to the bottom—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.
Government House leader?

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I don't think any of us know what the official opposition want. On one day, we have the member from Cambridge saying that an inquiry is too expensive, and then several days later, the member from North Bay holds a press conference calling for the inquiry.

The Premier comes forward and offers the select committee instead of having one that is focused on a very

mean-spirited and vindictive motion, and the opposition decides to go with what, quite frankly, is nothing but a vindictive witch hunt against a former member of this Legislature.

And then several days ago, Mr. Speaker, we hear from the Leader of the Opposition—his commitment not only to this Legislature but to all Ontarians that he will be voting against the budget, which has not even been written yet.

Quite frankly, I think it's time that the official opposition perhaps took some time internally to figure out what it is they want and how they can best represent the interests of Ontarians.

WINTER HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Premier. Premier, highway conditions in northern Ontario and across this province in winter are atrocious. We're seeing more and more road closures; we're seeing more and more accidents. Why? Because highways are not being maintained to the standard they should.

We know that the Conservatives started winter road maintenance privatization; your government accelerated it. And what's worse is you have even privatized the patrolling of highways as to how we dispatch salt trucks and plow trucks.

Why did your government privatize that section of the work? Because clearly now, we're not getting the maintenance that we need on our highways.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I want to thank my friend from Timmins–James Bay for the question. Obviously, things have deteriorated for him, because last year he rose in the House to compliment us on the work that's done. I do—

Interjections.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I know. Maybe the thought of a New Democrat complimenting Liberals—perish the thought.

But we do maintain—

Interjections.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: We do, Mr. Speaker, maintain the exact same road standards.

I've been meeting with northern municipalities. This has not come up as a complaint. I know I'm meeting with the mayor of Timmins later, from your constituency. I would like you to attend. If there are particular problems that I am aware of, I will happily sit down and work to resolve them with you. I know the member from Algoma–Manitoulin raised a similar issue. I've committed to meet with him and his municipal representatives.

The enemy of good is perfect—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Speaker, the fact that the minister is not aware that our highways are in bad condition this winter is quite frankly surprising.

It is not as if you have been without warning. It has been reported in the news for the last number of months, the same thing this year as it was last year.

My question to you is a very simple one: Why did your government go ahead and privatize the patrolling of the highways that was done by the MTO? Because without those patrols, we are not dispatching sand, salt and plow trucks in the way that we should, and as a result, our highways are in terrible condition. Why did you privatize it?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Unlike the parties opposite, we are not ideologically hidebound to a public sector or private sector solution. We believe in pragmatic, evidence-based public policy.

Every single snow removal vehicle in the north right now across Ontario has GPS and is tracked and monitored every moment that it's on duty. I don't think there's a higher standard of accountability that I'm aware of than that.

The standards—

Interjection.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, I think the honourable member—I listened to him. I would just ask for the same courtesy.

Interjection.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Sorry—

Interjection.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I'm trying to join you in this race to the top.

Mr. Speaker, the changes that were made were done with contracts to maintain a standard. If there is evidence from the member opposite, I will take that very seriously if that standard is not being maintained. But I don't want to have this driven by ideology. Whether it's private or public sector delivery of services, the standard must be maintained.

VISITOR

Hon. Jeff Leal: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order: In the visitors' west gallery, I'd like to introduce a good friend of mine, Mr. Joe Crowley. He's the deputy mayor of Asphodel–Norwood. The Crowley family are part of a great agricultural dynasty in Peterborough county. Mr. Crowley.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1139 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Todd Smith: I have a wonderful-looking crew here from Bancroft in North Hastings. Let me start with the mayor of Bancroft, Bernice Jenkins. We also have Steve and Linda Silver, Perry Kelly and Patsy O'Neill, Hazel Lambe, Steve Bruce, and the deputy mayor is

Wayne Wiggins. We welcome them all into town for the ROMA conference and here at Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We love to have visitors. Welcome.

Mr. Mike Colle: With me today I have Vaishali Prajapati and her son Rishabh Prajapati, who are here for the introduction of Jayesh's bill.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: It's a pleasure this afternoon to welcome Scott Stewart, from Peterborough, to our members' gallery—a great member of the team.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I think he looked lonely, being the only other person not introduced. So, welcome.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ROB DUCEY

Mr. Rob Leone: I rise today to acknowledge the accomplishments of one of Cambridge's most celebrated residents. It's not every day that someone from your hometown is voted into the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame.

Cambridge resident Rob Ducey spent 13 seasons in the majors and split time with both Canadian teams, the Montreal Expos and the Toronto Blue Jays. In the process, he became the first Canuck to play both professional clubs north of the border.

He took his talents to Japan in 1995 and 1996, belting 51 home runs during a stint with the Nippon Ham Fighters of the Pacific League. He represented Canada at the Olympics in 2004 before serving as a coach for his country at the 2006 World Baseball Classic and the 2008 Beijing Games.

Ducey will take his rightful place in a ceremony in June, alongside George Bell and Tim Raines and long-time Blue Jays announcer Tom Cheek.

It's a well-deserved honour for the best player to come out of Cambridge, and we're so proud to share him with St. Marys in Perth-Wellington and the rest of Canada.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Congratulations to Rob Ducey.

GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Mr. Michael Mantha: People in Algoma-Manitoulin and all across the north are disappointed with the government's decision to once again cut ServiceOntario hours and jobs. Northerners who rely on these counters in Manitouwadge, Wawa, Chapleau, along the North Shore and on Manitoulin Island will now have their hours of operation cut in half. This is not the first time northerners have been told they would have to wait longer for their birth certificates, health cards and licences.

This government claims that the affected sites were low in volume, but of all these 22 sites, 21 of them are located in northern Ontario, once again denying northerners the same access to these services in comparison to the rest of the province. These cuts will have a negative

impact on local business and the local economy, as well as on employees who will experience reduced hours and job losses.

ServiceOntario generates \$2.7 billion annually in revenue for the province on an operating budget of only \$270 million. With these large revenues, why are northerners made to suffer again? The government made its intent to privatize ServiceOntario very clear last February, something that is a cause for great concern. We know all too well what happens with privatization.

Northern Ontario should not unfairly bear the brunt of Liberal decisions to slash operating budgets, regardless of where your address is or your home. All Ontarians should be treated equally by their government.

Speaker, northerners are not asking for more, but will certainly not accept anything less.

CLAUDETTE BOYER

M. Phil McNeely: I will be speaking about a powerful voice that is no longer there, a voice for good in our communities of Ottawa–Vanier and Ottawa–Orléans.

Monsieur le Président, comme vous le savez, j'ai l'honneur et le privilège de représenter la merveilleuse communauté d'Ottawa–Orléans depuis 10 ans, cette communauté qui compte près de 35 % de francophones. C'est pourquoi je m'adresse à vous aujourd'hui pour souligner l'héritage d'une grande dame de la francophonie qui nous a malheureusement quitté de façon précipitée le 16 février dernier et dont les funérailles ont eu lieu ce matin.

Il s'agit de M^{me} Claudette Boyer. Elle était la preuve parfaite de la persistance et de l'importance de défendre les droits linguistiques en situation minoritaire. Elle l'a d'ailleurs démontré depuis les dernières années en tant que directrice générale de l'ACFO Ottawa—l'Association des communautés francophones d'Ottawa. Elle a marqué l'Ontario français et une page historique de notre Parlement en devenant la première femme francophone élue à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario en 1999.

Notre province, la communauté francophile et principalement la communauté franco-ontarienne perdent une alliée de taille. Femme d'action hors pair, M^{me} Boyer a toujours su rassembler la communauté francophone. Elle laissera certes un vide à Ottawa, tout comme dans les coeurs des Ontariennes et Ontariens. À nous tous de lui prouver, par nos actions, que ce qu'elle a apporté à la francophonie de l'Ontario est là pour rester.

Merci, monsieur le Président.

Le Président (L'hon. Dave Levac): Merci beaucoup.

WIND TURBINES

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: It's been a busy couple of days at the ROMA-Good Roads conference. I had a full slate of meetings, and there was a recurring theme: industrial wind turbines. It's an understatement to say that municipalities are concerned about the economics of turbines being forced into their communities because this

Liberal government stripped away their planning authority with the Green Energy Act. In fact, there are municipalities that are facing losses from developers for doing what they feel is in the best interests of their community and their constituents. This is unacceptable.

Last month I revealed FOIs that showed that the Ministry of the Environment had been told by senior environmental officers from Guelph that there were negative health effects from wind turbines. Unfortunately, according to an email exchange, the officers were told to stand down.

The FOIs also showed that the Chief Medical Officer of Health was told to make sure she used the term "direct" when referring to health impacts of turbines because the reality is, there are indirect impacts. In fact, in an internal Q&A document, she was told to "fess up to the annoyance link."

On Friday, the Grey Bruce medical officer of health released her own review, and she told the public that the Liberal government cannot prove there is no association between industrial wind turbines and indirect impacts.

Speaker, the evidence is mounting. The new Premier promised to be respectful and direct, and today I ask her: Will she be respectful and direct and immediately call for a moratorium on industrial wind turbines until proper health studies have been completed?

BELL LET'S TALK DAY

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: On February 12, Canadians from all across the country took part in the third annual Bell Let's Talk Day for mental health. Canadians combined for just under 100 million tweets, Facebook shares, texts and long distance calls, leading to Bell donating more than \$4.8 million to mental health programs.

Let's Talk Day is part of a growing effort to fight the stigma around mental health issues. A few years ago, I had the humbling opportunity to act as Chair of the all-party Select Committee on Mental Health and Addictions. I think all members of our committee learned a lot from that experience. What we heard repeatedly was about the importance of reducing stigma, because two-thirds of people with mental health issues still continue to suffer in silence for fear of being judged or rejected.

1510

Ontario has made significant progress in the past few years, with our province's first comprehensive strategy for mental health and addictions. Success in reducing stigma requires efforts from individuals, governments, organizations and corporate partners such as Bell. So today, Speaker, I'd like to commend Bell for being such a great corporate leader in growing mental health awareness, as well as the many Canadians who took part in the latest Let's Talk Day.

PENSION PLANS

Mr. Jim Wilson: My statement is directed to the Minister of Finance. It concerns the Pension Benefits Amend-

ment Act and the regulations that are outstanding that would allow for the transfer of pension assets for roughly 10,000 public sector employees that are affected by past public sector divestments.

I rise for the 11th time on this issue, as my pleas have consistently been ignored. It has been almost three years since the Pension Benefits Amendment Act was passed in this Legislature, and the government has yet to introduce the needed regulations that would allow for the transfer of pension assets for public sector employees. While the government has said on multiple occasions that these regulations are a priority, the thousands of public sector employees that are affected continue to wait in limbo for the government to act.

In the most recent response to my correspondence from August 15, 2012, the then Minister of Finance states: "The regulations are a high priority for the government and we hope to be able to release them later this year." It's now over six months since the former minister made those comments.

This holdup is affecting real people like paramedics and former MPAC employees in my riding and across the province who have had their lives and retirement plans put on hold as they wait for these regulations. How in good conscience can the government deny these public sector workers pensions that they paid into over the years? Regulations need to be created now so this issue can be dealt with fairly and immediately.

WINTER HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I rise today to speak about a problem that is getting worse in northern Ontario: the condition of our roads this winter. People in Nickel Belt wake up to beautiful sunny days to find out that Highway 144 is closed again and that school buses are cancelled again. Our kids have been back at school for seven weeks; the buses have been cancelled seven times. That means that the schools are open but the kids in Nickel Belt cannot get to those schools.

If the highway is not closed, it is snow-packed and ice-covered, and there's no salt or sand to be found anywhere. When my constituents call the Ministry of Transportation to complain, they are more or less told to "live with it." Mr. Speaker, "live with it" is not an acceptable answer.

Nickel Belt is made out of 33 little communities all around and to the north and south of Sudbury. We depend on our roads as a lifeline to connect us to work, to school and to the grocery store. When these highways are ignored for 48 hours after the end of a snowfall, a drive can become a high-risk activity, even a life-threatening activity. Further, Highway 144 is the only road between Sudbury and Timmins; it is very active with mining activities right now. When this highway is closed, workers can't get to work. They cannot produce the wealth that the province deserves.

I hope our Premier and Minister of Transportation are listening.

SCARBOROUGH WALK OF FAME

Ms. Soo Wong: I rise here to share good news with the Legislature. Last Friday, the Scarborough Walk of Fame's 2013 inductees were announced. They include Christine Bentley, a retired, trusted news anchor for CTV; the Barnaked Ladies, formed in Scarborough; Dwayne Morgan, an entrepreneur, poet and speaker; Monika Schnarre, model and actress; Scarborough Historical Society members Lionel Purcell and Richard Schofield; Judie Oliver, an accomplished master swimmer; and the honourable Gerry Phillips, a former member of provincial Parliament and cabinet minister who represented my riding of Scarborough-Agincourt in a number of capacities, both as a school board trustee and as a member of the Legislature. What's most fitting is, he has been recognized for his community work under that category. A lifestyle advocate for Scarborough and a personal mentor of mine, I want to congratulate the honourable Gerry Phillips and all the other inductees for the Scarborough Walk of Fame.

DRIVE CLEAN

Mr. Norm Miller: There has been much talk of late by the current government about charting a new course. However, their recent handling of the outdated Drive Clean program suggests they are on the same old road of unnecessary regulations and higher costs for consumers.

Questions have already been raised about the negative impacts of the new Drive Clean regulations for car owners, but there is also a significant impact for heavy truck operators.

I was recently contacted by Steve Hammond of Northland Truck Centre in my riding of Parry Sound-Muskoka. The new rules that took effect January 31, 2013, required him to purchase new mobile testing equipment. The rushed introduction of the new rules means that the new equipment is still not available, and he can't get parts for the existing equipment, so he is left in limbo, unable to do the tests. To make matters worse, the new test takes much longer to complete and will result in a doubling of the cost for consumers.

We cannot hope to create jobs in Ontario by needlessly increasing the regulatory burden on businesses with undue regulations such as these. This is yet another example of how the current Liberal government is just as committed to making it difficult to do business in the province of Ontario as the last one was.

I call on Premier Wynne to take the advice of the Auditor General and conduct a thorough review of the usefulness of Drive Clean and begin taking the necessary steps toward dismantling what has become a \$30-million-a-year cash grab.

I would also like to encourage Ontarians to visit scrapdriveclean.ca to sign our petition and put an end to this costly program.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I have—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): When you guys are finished—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): They're not finished yet. I'm just waiting. Okay.

I have two items. The first one is a commentary on rotation for statements: always rotation; not necessarily rotation. I want to make it clear that if it gets to the point where this holding-off coming into rotation is there—I ask three times and if no one stands, that's the end. I just want you to be aware of the rotation issue. I understand why it's done and how it's done, but I wanted to be clear about it. I go to two times, and on the third time, if somebody doesn't stand, then that's the end of statements, just for everyone's clarification.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 98(c), a change has been made to the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business such that Mr. Dunlop assumes ballot item number 8 and Mr. McNaughton assumes ballot item number 47.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

AMBULANCE AMENDMENT ACT (AIR AMBULANCES), 2013

LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES AMBULANCES (SERVICES D'AMBULANCE AÉRIENS)

Ms. Matthews moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 11, An Act to amend the Ambulance Act with respect to air ambulance services / Projet de loi 11, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les ambulances en ce qui concerne les services d'ambulance aériens.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'll make my statement during ministerial statements.

JAYESH'S LAW (WORKER SAFETY AT SERVICE STATIONS), 2013

LOI JAYESH DE 2013 SUR LA SÉCURITÉ DES TRAVAILLEURS DANS LES STATIONS-SERVICE

Mr. Colle moved first reading of the following bill: Bill 12, An Act to amend various statutes with respect to worker safety at service stations / Projet de loi 12, Loi

modifiant diverses lois en ce qui a trait à la sécurité des travailleurs dans les stations-service.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement?

1520

Mr. Mike Colle: Yes. As you know, Mr. Speaker, over 10,000 gas thefts occur across this province at gas stations every year. Men and women who work for \$10 an hour risk their lives when they go to work at a gas station, and it's about time we did something about it. This act would at least take away or at least suspend the licence of a convicted gas thief. It would also penalize gas station operators who deduct the wages of the operators for gas thefts. Thirdly, it would provide for a system of prepayment to be introduced in Ontario at gas stations.

ROYAL CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC ACT, 2013

Mrs. Cansfield moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr11, An Act respecting The Royal Conservatory of Music.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to standing order 86, this bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): This is a bill entitled An Act respecting The Royal Conservatory of Music—first reading of the bill.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Actually, I was so enthusiastic to make sure that that happened, I got ahead of myself. So, pursuant to standing order 86, this bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I rise in the House today to reintroduce legislation to amend the Ambulance Act. I would like to start by thanking the paramedics, the pilots and the front-line staff at Ornge who, from the beginning, have put patients first—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I hear the member from Renfrew speaking, but I don't see him in his seat.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: You know what? He's the invisible man today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Okay. Carry on.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm very proud of the work our government has done to help those front-line staff do the job they do so well, day in and day out, providing the best possible care for the people of Ontario.

I am very pleased to say that Ornge is well into a new chapter. It is on the right path forward. Ornge now has a culture that puts patients first, that respects taxpayers and that values transparency. Further, over the past month, Ornge has continued to take significant steps to renew its organization.

I'm very pleased to say that we've already made significant progress to increase accountability, oversight and transparency at Ornge since the release of the Auditor General's report.

The amendments to the Ambulance Act that I'm introducing today are in addition to the actions that my ministry and Ornge have already taken.

Among those changes that have taken place, Ornge has appointed a new patient advocate, established a conflict-of-interest protocol, created whistleblower hotline policy, submitted its quality improvement plan and has had its new interim medical aircraft interiors approved by Transport Canada.

I'd also like to emphasize that our amended performance agreement requires Ornge to comply with the Public Sector Salary Disclosure Act. The new performance agreement also provides greater accountability, oversight and transparency to safeguard patient care and provide better value for taxpayer dollars.

I am very pleased that Dr. Andrew McCallum has taken over the leadership at Ornge. Dr. McCallum is formally trained as a military flight surgeon and is the former Chief Coroner of Ontario. He is exceptionally well qualified to lead this organization. I know that he is dedicated to ensuring continued improvement at Ornge. I'm confident that he will build on the tremendous progress that has already been made over the past year.

I'm grateful to the new leadership and front-line staff at Ornge for their commitment to introduce greater transparency and accountability, a commitment that our government shares and that this bill demonstrates.

The legislation addresses several issues, and I'd like to highlight three of them. First, it is vitally important that employees do not feel intimidated when raising their concerns. Ornge took an important step forward when it introduced a whistle-blower policy last year. Our proposed legislation will entrench protections for employees who disclose information to an inspector, an investigator or to the ministry.

Secondly, these proposed amendments will allow the government to take control of Ornge in extraordinary circumstances, through the appointment of a supervisor, just like we do with our hospitals. These changes will also allow us to appoint special investigators where it is in the public interest to do so, and to appoint members to Ornge's board of directors, including the chair.

Third, in the past, if we needed to make changes to the government's performance agreement with Ornge, we

could do so only with Ornge's agreement. That simply was not feasible when immediate changes needed to be made. That's why the proposed legislation will allow the government to change the performance agreement with Ornge at any time.

These proposed amendments to the Ambulance Act will strengthen oversight and restore public confidence in Ontario's air ambulance service.

We're also taking new steps to enhance transparency at Ornge, Mr. Speaker. In addition to this legislation, our government is also proposing to make Ornge subject to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act through regulation. This measure, which would allow for retroactive freedom-of-information requests, is in keeping with our government's approach with broader public sector organizations.

I want to stress that these measures represent and reflect common ground between government and both opposition parties. I know that members on both sides of the House want to see greater transparency and greater accountability at Ornge. I also know that members from all parties want to see action that responds to the Auditor General's report.

In short, I encourage all members who care about providing patients with the very best air ambulance service to become part of the solution by supporting this bill. It's the best way to protect taxpayers and, most importantly, patients.

I'm steadfastly committed to continuing our progress at Ornge, and I'm confident that the steps we're proposing today will provide the strong oversight needed to ensure a very bright future for Ontario's air ambulance service. Thank you.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It's now time for responses.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to respond to the reintroduction of the Ambulance Amendment Act on behalf of the official opposition.

I think this is one of the most important issues that this Legislature will be addressing, which is the safety of Ontarians and the ability of the government to deliver high-quality and safe air ambulance services.

Before I go any further, I would like to salute and thank the front-line service providers, from the pilots to the paramedics and all of the other front-line service personnel, who have done an exemplary job in the face of very, very difficult times recently.

However, as far as the government goes, after listening to the Minister of Health today, I fear once again it has been a little bit too little, too late. This is another example of the Liberal government talking a big game but never taking the appropriate steps to ensure substantive legislation to protect Ontarians.

It has been less than a year since I stood in this House and pointed out that nothing really has changed. This government cobbled together this piece of legislation in haste, in order to provide cover for the ministry's and

minister's failure to do their job and to provide the appropriate oversight of the air ambulance service in Ontario.

What's even more troubling is, the legislation was put together before the public accounts committee heard from all of the relevant witnesses and before we understood what the conditions were that led to this air ambulance mess at Ornge in the first place. How can you possibly expect to develop a piece of legislation when you don't really even know what the problem is yet? And this is, despite the amendments—that's what this amendment bill is purporting to do.

To this day, we still don't fully know what happened at Ornge, because the government refused to strike a select committee and because they were unwilling to retrieve all the pertinent documents from Ornge. Even the Auditor General himself in 2012 noted that Ornge wouldn't willingly provide his investigation with documents.

Now, the minister and the Liberals would like Ontarians to believe she didn't have the power to intervene at Ornge, and that's why this scandal happened and that's why we need this legislation. But, Mr. Speaker, we know that is simply not true. The minister did have the power to intervene at Ornge under the original performance agreement, as well as the Independent Health Facilities Act. Article 15 of the original performance agreement gave her powers of intervention.

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The fact is, since the McGuinty government created Ornge, the operation has been riddled by mismanagement and scandal, as documented by numerous Auditor General reports dating back to 2005.

In his 2005 audit of land ambulance services, the Auditor General recommended that the ministry conduct unannounced reviews to ensure consistent quality of service. However, although the act allows the ministry to conduct unannounced reviews, the ministry's current policy is to provide advance notice of at least 90 days. Despite the advance notice, about one third, including Ornge, did not pass their scheduled review the first time. The review cited issues such as aircraft that were not properly stocked with medical supplies and equipment, and medical oxygen equipment that was improperly maintained.

The ministry's failure to heed this good advice from the Auditor General in 2005 and to take appropriate action demonstrates that the ministry has fumbled this service for years. This poor oversight and management has only worsened in recent years.

A leaked secret cabinet document entitled Investigations Concerning Air Ambulance and Related Services, which was circulated among the Liberals' top brass, confirms that the Minister of Health was warned of numerous problems and that patients in respiratory distress could not be provided with appropriate care due to the interior design of the Ornge helicopters. That document directly links the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to more than a year of inaction that could have resulted in several deaths and endangered patients.

The first incident occurred on July 15, 2011. The document states: "While en route to an on-scene rotary-wing request, the" critical care paramedic "notified Sudbury CCAC he was unable to perform CPR on the AW139 and would have to accompany the patient in the land ambulance. The patient subsequently was declared dead."

The emergency health services branch investigation report of this incident, dated October 4, 2011, states: "It was found that due to the interior of the AW139, which was designed by Ornge staff, continuous quality CPR could not be performed in accordance with ...[basic life support] standards per s. 11(a) under the Ambulance Act. It was also found that patients in respiratory distress could not be provided with appropriate patient care...."

On and on it went, Mr. Speaker.

Clearly, there is more that needs to be done than a few sundry changes being made to the act. We need to continue to investigate this, to get to the bottom of Ornge, to ensure patient safety here—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Further responses.

M^{me} France Gélinas: When this bill was originally introduced, New Democrats, including myself, had many concerns. Today, I listened carefully to what the minister had to say, and I must say that a lot of my concerns are still there.

We were concerned, first of all, that Ornge would not be subject to FOI; I'm now told that, through regulation, it will be. I will trust her word and know that it will come through. But will that mean that any subsidiary of Ornge will also be subject to FOI? I don't know this. The minister did not cover that. That was part of my first series of worries.

My second is that I want Ombudsman oversight. If you are serious that you want transparency and you want accountability, then you have to give the Ombudsman the right to investigate complaints. There had been complaints, Mr. Speaker, about Ornge, but there was no way for those grievances and those complaints to be heard. There was nobody to turn to. The Ombudsman knows how to do investigations of complaints. He should have oversight.

Ornge will continue to be an organization that cannot be called in front of Government Agencies. This is also another measure that this Legislative Assembly has to make sure that we have accountability, that we have true transparency into the transfer payment agencies of the Ministry of Health. The minister did not mention that it was going to be in the bill—and I haven't read the bill; it was just tabled. I hope it will be there.

I will be looking closely at this second rendition of this bill to see if we really are on target to bring accountability and transparency.

We will also be looking for some straight talk, both from the Ministry of Health and from their government, as to how the Ornge fiasco happened in the first place.

How come this happened? How could it happen here in Ontario? After months—and I lost count of how many days we sat at Ornge hearings—and in spite of testimony that showed government was complacent and basically allowed this mess to continue for a very long time, so far the ministry has refused to look at what was their role in letting this unfold for so long.

They have avoided the fact that they did not fulfill their obligation under the existing accountability agreement. Was it a good accountability agreement? Absolutely not. Can it be made better? Absolutely, yes. But even if you have a bad agreement, if you don't fulfill your side, if you don't use it, then all is for naught. It doesn't matter if the agreement is better if you don't do your side of oversight.

This is significant, because that leads me to believe that in the thousands of transfer payment agencies at the Ministry of Health, there could be another Ornge right here, right now. There could be another transfer payment agency that is spending taxpayers' money in a way that is not acceptable. There could be people coming to the ministry, blowing the whistle and telling them, "Listen, there's something wrong here," and the ministry not doing anything and the mess is agreed to continue.

I want to learn. I want to go to the bottom as to how could this have happened. How could it be that something that was the jewel of this province turned out so badly? Why do I want to go to the bottom? Because only then will we have learned what really went wrong. Why? Because this way we can make sure that it never happens again.

With the thousands of transfer payment agencies out there; with all sorts of accountability agreements existing out there; with all sorts of people who are trying to put complaints forward but there is no way for those complaints to be picked up, to be heard, to be aired, then the chance that there's another one is real and it exists.

So, yes, we will go back to Public Accounts. We will go to the bottom of Ornge, not because it is necessarily a fun task to do—believe me, it's not—but it is a necessary one so that the transparency and the accountability measures that we put forward are the ones that will assure the people of Ontario that this will never happen again.

PETITIONS

AIR QUALITY

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm always pleased to present a petition on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Durham. This one reads as follows—earlier today the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka spoke on the Drive Clean program:

"Whereas collecting and restoring old vehicles honours Ontario's automotive heritage while contributing to the economy through the purchase of goods and services, tourism, and support for special events; and

"Whereas the stringent application of emissions regulations for older cars equipped with newer engines can result in fines and additional expenses that discourage car collectors and restorers from pursuing their hobby; and

"Whereas newer engines installed by hobbyists in vehicles over 20 years old provide cleaner emissions than the original equipment; and

"Whereas car collectors typically use their vehicles only on an occasional basis, during" five or six "months of the year;

"Therefore, be it resolved that the Ontario Legislature support Ontarians who collect and restore old vehicles by amending the appropriate laws and regulations" in Drive Clean "to ensure vehicles over 20 years old and exempt from Drive Clean testing shall also be exempt from additional emissions requirements enforced by the Ministry of the Environment and governing the installation of newer engines into old cars and trucks."

I'm pleased to sign and support this on behalf of Gerry Lukow and many others in my riding of Durham.

AIR-RAIL LINK

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: This is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas diesel trains are a health hazard for people who live near them;

"Whereas more toxic fumes will be created by the 400 daily trains than the car trips they are meant to replace;

"Whereas the planned air-rail link does not serve the communities through which it passes and will be priced beyond the reach of most commuters;

"Whereas all major cities in the world with train service between their downtown core and the airport use electric trains;

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"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the province of Ontario stop building the air-rail link for diesel and move to electrify the route immediately;

"That the air-rail link be designed, operated and priced as an affordable transportation option between all points along its route."

I join my signature to the tens of thousands that have signed this and I give it to Jaden to be delivered to the table.

SPRINGWATER PROVINCIAL PARK

Mr. Jim Wilson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas we oppose the making [of] Springwater Provincial Park in Springwater township, Ontario, non-operational on March 31, 2013;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"We ask that the park remain operating and facilities such as the animal sanctuary, cabins/shelters, playground

equipment and ground maintenance remain open and operating."

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to sign this petition.

OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition from the people of Nickel Belt.

"Whereas there are a growing number of reported cases of no accountability, complacency, waste, patient neglect and substandard care in our health care system;

"Whereas people with complaints have limited options, and oversight of most health care agencies is done by that agency or sometimes through the ministry;

"Whereas Ontario is one of the few provinces in Canada where our Ombudsman does not have independent oversight of health care" facilities;

They "petition the Legislative Assembly ... to expand the Ombudsman's mandate to include investigation of our health care services, including health units, hospitals, retirement homes, long-term-care facilities and ambulance services."

I fully support this petition, Madam Speaker, and will give it to page A.J. to bring it to the Clerk.

FAMILY SAFETY

Mr. Bob Delaney: I'm pleased to present this petition in the Legislature on behalf of one of the truly outstanding agencies in Peel region, which is Catholic Family Services Peel-Dufferin. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the Safer Families Program is a successful partnership of Catholic Family Services Peel-Dufferin, Family Services of Peel and the Peel Children's Aid Society (CAS), receives year-to-year funding from the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services, and is a critical component of social services to families within the Peel community; and

"Whereas the intervention model for Safer Families currently operates with no waiting lists, an important consideration for families experiencing domestic violence and child protection concerns, as they require immediate access to service; and

"Whereas the Safer Families Program is aligned with Ontario's child poverty agenda, is committed to preventing violence against women, and contributes to community capacity building to support child welfare delivery; and

"Whereas currently, Safer Families serves 14% of all domestic violence cases referred to Peel Children's Aid Society and has the ability to double the number of cases it handles;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario adjust its funding to supply ongoing core funding rather than year-to-year funding, and realign funding to double the percentage of cases referred by the Peel Children's Aid Society and served by the Safer Families Program."

Speaker, I'm pleased to sign and support this petition and to send it by page Alexander.

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the price of gas is reaching historic price levels and is expected to increase another 15% in the near future, yet oil prices are dropping; and

"Whereas the real reason for the high price of gas is, gas companies are putting pressure to allow for the pipeline from Alberta to Texas; and

"Whereas the" McGuinty-Wynne "government has done nothing to protect consumers from high gas prices; and

"Whereas the high and unstable gas prices across Ontario have caused confusion and unfair hardship to Ontario's drivers while also impacting the Ontario economy in key sectors such as tourism and transportation; and

"Whereas the high price of gas has a detrimental impact on all aspects of our already troubled economy and substantially increases the price of delivered commodities, adding further burden to Ontario consumers;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and urge the Premier to take action to protect consumers from the burden of high gas prices in Ontario."

I affix my signature in full support, Madam Speaker.

DOG OWNERSHIP

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Parkdale-High Park.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Nice to see you in the chair again.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas currently the law takes the onus off of owners that raise violent dogs by making it appear that violence is a matter of genetics; and

"Whereas the Dog Owners' Liability Act does not clearly define a pit bull, nor is it enforced equally across the province, as pit bulls are not an acknowledged breed;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Legislative Assembly passes Bill 16, Public Safety Related to Dogs Statute Law Amendment Act, 2011, into law."

I couldn't agree more. Again, I sign my name along with the tens of thousands and give it to Jaden to be delivered to the table. Jaden is a busy guy today.

HEALTH INSURANCE

Mr. Victor Fedeli: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontarians who require emergency in-patient hospital services while out-of-country are eligible to

receive a reimbursement of up to a maximum of \$400 for complex hospital care, and \$200 for less intensive medical care, and \$50 for outpatient care other than dialysis treatment; and

"Whereas in the 2004 provincial budget speech the Minister of Finance for Ontario stated it costs an average of \$851 per day to be in an Ontario hospital; and

"Whereas with a maximum out-of-country reimbursement rate of \$400 this is a clear violation of the portability principle of the Canada Health Act;

"We, the undersigned, do hereby petition the government of Ontario to abide by the portability principle of the Canada Health Act and raise out-of-country emergency reimbursement rates to equal those of health services in Ontario."

I agree with this petition, sign my name and pass it to page Daniella.

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas residents of Ontario want a moratorium on all further industrial wind turbine development until an independent third party health and environmental study has been completed; and

"Whereas people in Ontario living within close proximity to industrial wind turbines have reported negative health effects; we need to study the physical, social, economic and environmental impacts of industrial wind turbines; and the Auditor General confirmed wind farms were created in haste and with no planning;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ontario government place a moratorium on the approval of any wind energy projects and a moratorium on the construction of industrial wind projects until further studies on the potential adverse health effects of industrial wind turbines; their effect on the environment; the potential devaluation of residential property are completed; and that any industrial wind projects not currently connected to the grid be cancelled."

I agree, and I affix my name to this petition.

LANDFILL

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: "Whereas many of the resources of this planet are finite and are necessary to sustain both life and quality of life for all future generations;

"Whereas the disposal of resources in landfills creates environmental hazards which will have significant human and financial costs for;

"Whereas all levels of government are elected to guarantee their constituents' physical, financial, emotional and mental well-being;

"Whereas the health risks to the community and watershed increase in direct relationship to the proximity of any landfill site;

“Whereas the placement of a landfill in a limestone quarry has been shown to be detrimental;

“Whereas the placement of a landfill in the headwaters of multiple highly vulnerable aquifers is detrimental;

“Whereas the county of Oxford has passed a resolution requesting a moratorium on landfill construction or approval;

“Therefore be it resolved that we, the undersigned, humbly petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“To implement a moratorium in Oxford county on any future landfill construction or approval until such time as a full review of alternatives has been completed which would examine best practices in other jurisdictions around the world;

“That this review of alternatives would give special emphasis on (a) practices which involve the total recycling or composting of all products currently destined for landfill sites in Ontario and (b) the production of goods which can efficiently and practically be recycled or reused so as not to require disposal in landfills.”

I affix my signature, Madam Speaker, and I thank you very much for the opportunity to present the petition.

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Jim Wilson: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas we, the residents of Clearview township and neighbouring townships, oppose the wpd Canada Fairview wind project on Fairgrounds Road and all wind energy projects in Clearview township; and

1550

“Whereas we support the petition of mayors and councillors from 80 municipalities, farm organizations, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture and the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario, which petition requested that the province place an immediate moratorium on all wind projects until an independent and comprehensive health study has determined that turbine noise is safe to human health, amongst other things; and

“Whereas wpd Canada’s Fairview wind project violates the OLS airspace and usability of registered aerodromes in Clearview, including Collingwood Regional Airport and Stayner field, and wpd Canada’s draft renewal energy approvals reports do not recognize these impacts or the jurisdiction of the government of Canada; and

“Whereas wpd Canada is seeking final approval from the province for the Fairview wind project prior to completion of the federal Health Canada study and prior to federal actions to protect aviation safety;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the government of Ontario agree and accept that until the federal health study is completed and federal aeronautical zoning is in place, it will immediately take whatever action is necessary to give full effect to a moratorium on all wind turbine development in Ontario,

including all projects for which final approval has not yet been given.”

I agree with this petition, and I will sign it.

GASOLINE TAX

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Pembroke-Nipissing—no, the other way around—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): —Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Speaker.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the skyrocketing price of gasoline is causing hardship to families across Ontario; and

“Whereas the ... Liberal government charges a gasoline tax of 14.7 cents per litre to drivers in all parts of Ontario plus 8% for the provincial share of the HST tax; and

“Whereas gasoline tax revenues now go exclusively to municipalities with public transit systems, while roads and bridges crumble in other communities across Ontario;

“Whereas residents of Ontario have been shut out of provincial gasoline tax revenues to which they have contributed; and

“Whereas whatever one-time money that has flowed to municipalities from the ... Liberal government has been neither stable nor predictable, and has been insufficient to meet our infrastructure needs;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to redistribute provincial gasoline tax revenues fairly to all communities across the province.”

Speaker, I have a private member’s bill that would do this, so obviously I support the petition and affix my name to it—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Prince Edward-Hastings.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. Todd Smith: I present this on behalf of residents in the Bancroft and L’Amable area in Prince Edward-Hastings.

“Whereas the 2012 Ontario budget eliminates the Community Start-Up and Maintenance Benefit and the Home Repairs Benefit; and

“Whereas these two programs have been used by thousands of Ontarians across the province as a way of lifting themselves out of poverty and achieving financial independence; and

“Whereas these two programs are in the best tradition of providing Ontarians with a hand up and not a handout when they’re in need;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario find some way to restore the Community Start-Up and Maintenance Benefit and the Home Repairs Benefit that aid the Ontarians who depend on these services without endangering the province's ability to return the budget to balance."

I agree with this and will sign it.

OPPOSITION DAY

TEACHERS

ENSEIGNANTS ET ENSEIGNANTES

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I move that, in the opinion of this House, Ontario students and their parents deserve a world-class education system with the best and brightest teachers that includes extracurricular and co-curricular activities that are free from disruptions; and

Whereas extracurricular and co-curricular activities enrich our children's learning experience, and the McGuinty-Wynne government has been unable to ensure that these programs are protected in our schools; and

Whereas despite enacting and then repealing Bill 115, the Putting Students First Act, which imposed union contracts on teachers and education workers, the government has not been able to ensure stability in Ontario's schools; and

Whereas the House believes that teachers in our classrooms should be hired because they are the best and most qualified to teach our students rather than being hired based on seniority;

Therefore, the Premier and the Minister of Education should, within 72 hours of the passage of this motion, send a letter to all directors of education, trustees of district school boards and the union leaders at the central offices and local offices of all the provincial teachers' unions that expresses the will of this duly and democratically elected Legislature that:

The government should introduce legislation that amends a teacher's job description to re-include certain co-instructional activities that the Liberal government removed. Said co-instructional activities to be reintroduced into a teacher's legislated job description shall include, but not be limited to: timely and fully completed report cards; meeting with parents outside classroom hours; attending staff meetings; marking assignments; and helping students with remediation, special needs and extra work after school;

That union leaders should no longer tell front-line teachers how those teachers may use their personal time both inside or outside of the school day, including but not limited to: volunteering; helping students; supervising, performing or organizing extracurricular or co-curricular activities; and that contravening the aforementioned shall be considered by this House an abuse of union power and that those involved in such tactics should be referred to the Ministry of Labour for investigation for engaging in illegal labour action under

Ontario's Labour Relations Act and subject to fines; and that, if fined, they should be reported to the Ontario College of Teachers for workplace harassment and conduct unbecoming of a teaching professional;

That the Liberal government, through an order in council, should repeal all aspects of the controversial Ontario regulation 274/12, Hiring Practices, that was instated on September 12, 2012. By repealing this regulation, the government recognizes that they have hindered student success by preventing principals in our schools from hiring the best-qualified teacher for the job.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Debate? Ms. MacLeod.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much, Speaker. I appreciated the opportunity to move the motion on behalf of Ontario PC leader Tim Hudak and our entire caucus. This is a comprehensive plan to enhance co-instructional activities like report card writing and parent-teacher interviews. It is a plan to fully restore extracurricular activities in our schools, and it is a plan for our province to hire the best teachers for the job on merit rather than simply through seniority.

Speaker, as you know, the last few months have been very difficult on students and their parents. The labour disagreement between the government and the teachers' unions have placed Ontario students squarely in the middle, making them pawns in a dispute they have nothing to do with. We know, for example, that some unions have had their teachers cancel open houses and parent-teacher nights. Speaker, if I may, these are both substantial opportunities for parents to monitor their child's progress and learn more about the home and school expectations of the teachers. The Ontario Progressive Conservative caucus rejects that action. We believe it is unacceptable. It is intolerable and we want to change that.

We also know that some unions have had their teachers include only the bare minimum in the fall report cards. In fact, a memorandum from ETFO, the Elementary Teachers' Federation, to its 76,000 members advised its teachers to simply put in a "single sentence indicating strength and next steps" and further said, "Personalized feedback does not mean every student must have a different comment ... teachers are not required to fill all of the boxes." This is disappointing. Personalized feedback, Speaker, should be personalized because after all, each child in our education system is unique and they deserve to have a teacher who is fully analyzing their progress.

As a parent, I can attest report cards are an important way for me, as I know they are for other parents, to assess my child's learning. And we know, for example, that extracurriculars, the great equalizer in our province, have been removed by the unions who have threatened their teachers with sanctions if they were to dare offer after-school clubs, drama productions or music lessons outside of school hours. This is particularly destructive, Speaker, to students who rely on extracurricular activities to enrich their student learning. I think of a small child

who may not be able to afford, through his or her parents, to play hockey in a house league, but they can through school. This action that has been taking place in our school system for the past seven months is hurting that child, is hurting that person's equal opportunity, and it needs to be restored.

1600

If I may speak right now to those teachers who don't support the union's activities, it is personally, I think, destructive for them as well. That is why it is time for Ontario to clearly define a teacher's job and take action to protect our children's extracurricular and co-curricular activities, which have become bargaining chips in the recent labour dispute.

We need to shift the focus in our education system back onto the students in this province and away from our unions. After all, our education system was built for student learning and success, not to embolden union leaders. Reducing the ability of union leaders to inflict punishment on our children and on their teachers is a critical priority for Tim Hudak and the Ontario Progressive Conservative caucus. Our motion will protect teachers like Ottawa's Caroline Orchard from being told by union leaders how they may spend their personal time, both inside and outside of the school, by recommending that sanctions be placed on those who engage in these practices.

Caroline Orchard is a high school teacher at Sir Robert Borden High School in Nepean, in the city of Ottawa. She recently launched a petition called "It Is My Time." We couldn't agree more in the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party. Extracurriculars are done on voluntary time. That means government can't tell a teacher what he or she can do on their spare time, but a union leader shouldn't be able to tell them what they're not allowed to do on their spare time. We think those intimidation tactics are terrible. We think it's time that they be removed.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Draconian.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's draconian. We need to move our system into the 21st century and not be stuck in 1950s labour tactics that hurt our students and hurt those teachers who want to teach.

But, Speaker, that's not all. Our recent white paper on education talks about if a teacher is not available. We'll give more power to principals, just like the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board did, to find community volunteers to coach that hockey team, direct that school play, lead that school trip and so on. The show must go on because our students in our schools in Ontario deserve that.

On Friday, the Premier decided that she would applaud herself for OSSTF's recent announcement on extracurriculars. But that plan, if you could even call it a plan, is problematic. While the OSSTF head now says that teachers can offer extracurricular activities, he openly admits that a large percentage of his teachers will not go back to extracurriculars. We also know that the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario has not decided that they would restore extracurricular activities.

Beyond all that, we know that at the drop of a hat, the minute these union leaders get angry again, they'll take it out on our students and they will employ these same tactics. That is not fair. We cannot put our students in that position one more time. That is why we have taken a tough stand here today, on behalf of students, through the Ontario Progressive Conservative caucus. We will restore extracurriculars in our schools, and we'll do it in a responsible and a sustainable way, because we believe students need to be put first.

My final point is if this motion is passed, it will also recommend that the government amend the Education Act to include certain co-instructional activities that the McGuinty-Wynne Liberal government had previously removed. Co-instructional activities, as I mentioned, like timely and fully completed report cards, meeting with parents outside of classroom hours, marking assignments and helping students with extra work should not be optional. It should not be optional.

It is time to give our students and their parents certainty in our education system by legislating a teacher's job description. We will restore parents' confidence in the classroom by ensuring those important duties are not only recognized but they are completed. The best learning experience is one where parents and students know what the results are. They can analyze and assess and move from there. That is the best way, Speaker.

Finally, our motion would repeal regulation 274/12, that came as a result of Bill 115. The Ontario PC caucus made it clear we did not support this regulation, because it places seniority above merit in the hiring of our teachers.

We were pleased to see a recent Toronto Star editorial support our position when they said, "Scrap Rules that Block Best Teachers from Getting Jobs." They point out that "when given the chance, principals hiring teachers for long-term contracts, such as those filling maternity leaves, look beyond general qualifications. They want a teacher whose character and talents fit the needs of students in their school. Quite simply, it's good for the kids."

"But sadly, it is now forbidden. Ontario Minister of Education Laurel Broten has blocked principals' freedom to hire by bringing in a new rule in the Education Act called regulation 274. It says hiring must be based on seniority. Nothing else matters."

It goes on to say that this Liberal government now has an opportunity with a new Minister of Education to correct this, to repeal that, and that's what we're asking them for. This motion and a future Ontario Progressive Conservative government agree. We will place merit-based hiring back on the agenda. Parents can count on us in the Ontario PC Party to make sure that the best and the brightest teachers are in our classrooms because we'll let boards and principals pick the best and the most qualified.

This motion is about students. We chose to put the first motion for the opposition on the table today on education because we cannot afford more labour strife in

our schools at the expense of Ontario students. We need to return our education system to fit the students' needs, not the unions' needs, and we will continue to be on the side of students, parents and teachers who want to teach. They can count on Tim Hudak and they can count on the Ontario Progressive Conservative caucus to speak and act for them.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's my pleasure to speak to the motion put forward by the Progressive Conservative caucus here in the Legislature regarding education. It's interesting because the final remarks of the member who brought the motion forward said something about, "We can't afford more labour strife in the education system in Ontario," and I would resoundingly agree with that, which is why New Democrats will certainly not be supporting a motion that all but guarantees more labour strife in the province of Ontario. It's kind of like one of those things about doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result.

We know what the Liberals did to throw the education system into chaos in this province. We know they did it for a politically motivated reason: in order to try to take a Conservative seat in a by-election in Kitchener-Waterloo. Thank goodness the people of Kitchener-Waterloo were actually paying attention to what the stakes were in that by-election. They could have taken the easy path. They could have taken the rhetoric and the simplistic solutions that were being brought forward by the Conservative Party. They could have taken the fearmongering, the anger, the divisiveness, because the Liberals were salivating at getting back majority power. But no, the people of Kitchener-Waterloo took a very circumspect look at what was happening politically in Ontario and they decided that the smart thing to do was to keep the Liberals away from a majority situation and make sure that the Conservatives knew very well that their simplistic ideas were not the right path for Ontario.

So I find it quite amazing that the Conservatives think that legislating solutions by taking a ham-fisted approach is somehow going to change what parents and what students are experiencing right now in Ontario. In fact, what it would do is guarantee more of the same.

New Democrats know very well that the best way to get through difficult times is to do it in a respectful way. Everybody in Ontario knows that we've been going through some tough times. Most people in Ontario—in fact, I would say almost all—understand and believe in basic principles of fairness and understand that you have to work together to get solutions achieved, that everybody has to contribute to making this province a stronger place, that everybody has to contribute to the belt-tightening.

In other provinces, we've seen quite successful processes undertaken that respected something called collective bargaining, because guess what? That happened to be the law in Ontario at the time. Not that the Liberals noticed it; they would have rather pretended there wasn't

that law and so they temporarily took that away from the educational workers of this province, threw the educational system into chaos, and made sure that students, to this day, were not getting their extracurricular activities, because there was a situation of lack of resolution when it came to the problems that the Liberals provided or caused.

1610

But now what we have to look at is, how have other provinces dealt with this? Well, other provinces have actually understood that they are not the almighty, that in fact they have an obligation to follow the rules of legislation and respect the rules of engagement, if you will, when it comes to working these contracts out and working these processes out. So they actually set targets of zero and set budgetary targets in terms of restraint in provinces like Manitoba, provinces like British Columbia, provinces all across the country, and what they were able to do in fact was meet those targets. Let me just say that again: Other provinces were successfully able to meet the targets of zero increases, as well as other pieces of change that needed to be implemented to restrict the expenditures of those provinces, without throwing their educational systems into chaos.

How, Speaker? By having, within the rules, within the legislative rules that exist in those provinces, a respectful dialogue, having the negotiations, if you want to call them that, they actually worked out the problem in a mature, thoughtful, respectful way. I would say that that would be the way you achieve things in a province, one that prevents chaos, that prevents problems like the ones we're facing right now in Ontario.

What the Conservatives want to do, Speaker, is to throw gasoline onto the fire. I've got to tell you, I think the parents in this province, I think the children in this province, students, most everybody in this province, is pretty darned tired of gas being thrown on the fire when it comes to the educational system, and I think it's an irresponsible and wrong-headed thing to do. They can talk all they want about how it's strong and it's this and it's that. That's the same language that the Liberals used when they put Bill 115 in place, when they took us down this horribly wrong road that has led us into the chaos that we're now slowly trying to climb out of.

So I would say that it's very, very clear that the path forward for Ontario is a thoughtful path. It's a respectful path. It's a path where we actually value each other and do not create divisiveness. It's a path where we actually understand that you cannot improve the education system, nor the health care system, nor any of the other important parts of our public services that Ontario is proud of by being at war with or being in court with the very people who make those systems work and function. I mean, it's not rocket science.

So, yes, you can take the easy path and you can take the politically expedient path of making enemies out of people, of vilifying people, of saying, "I'm going to legislate away people's rights. I'm going to decide. I'm on high. They have to do what I say no matter what."

I have to question whether anybody in the Conservative caucus cares at all about the quality of extracurricular and co-curricular activities, because what they want to do is force people into doing things without even having a conversation or a dialogue or a negotiation about how to best serve the interests of students. They want to serve their political interests, Speaker. I understand that. They're a political party; that's their job. What Ontario wants to see, though, I think, are real solutions to the problems, not just politically motivated rhetoric and politically motivated divisiveness.

You know what? I welcome them to their method of doing things. I think it's wrong-headed. Not only do I think it's wrong-headed; I know it's wrong-headed. I think the people of this province have seen very clearly, because the Liberals did the exact same thing, and it got us into a huge mess that the Liberals are now trying to climb out of.

I know that the Liberal education minister is going to get up momentarily, and I know that she's going to talk about how they are negotiating and they have a respectful conversation going on right now. Well, you know what? That's something that I asked Dalton McGuinty and Dwight Duncan to do over a year ago. New Democrats warned Liberals that they shouldn't go down this road, that they should act in a responsible way, not a politically motivated way, but they decided to be best friends with the Conservatives because they wanted to steal one of their seats when they gave Elizabeth Witmer a plum position at the WSIB. Well, it failed, Speaker. Their machinations failed. In the meanwhile, students and parents have been suffering and our educational system has been thrown into turmoil.

But I say to you, clearly, and to the people of this province, clearly, that the easy path, the beating-of-your-chest path, the warpath that the Tories want to take the educational system on in this province is the wrong path. It's the same warpath that the Liberals have had us on for months and months and months, and it's the same failed path that has created the chaos that we are in now.

We believe that you treat people with dignity and respect. We believe that the best way to get to solutions is by working together and hammering them out within the processes that are set out in law in this province, which of course is why we're now in the courts. That's another thing that still exists. There's something called a court challenge, a Supreme Court challenge, because of the path that the Liberals went down and the Tories now want to take us down. How many billions and billions of dollars is that going to cost the province? Hundreds of millions, perhaps? Maybe only tens of millions. Those dollars should be going into education. They should be going into special education; they should be going into making sure that rural schools are not being closed; they should be going into making sure that we have the supports for special-needs kids that should be there. We should be making sure that our classrooms are not falling down around the ears of our students. We should be investing those dollars in actually making our education

system better and making sure it's meeting the needs of all of our students in this province, not wasting it on court challenges because a government decided they were more interested in their own political power and getting a majority back.

I think that it's pretty clear that the wrong-headed path that this motion takes us on is a huge mistake. Again, it's one of those things that is really clear, and it's, quite frankly, shocking. It's shocking to me that—you know, we've heard the phrase that you should learn from history, that you should know history because you can learn from it, and if you know your history, you're not destined to make the same mistakes over and over again. Well, I'm not talking about ancient history. I mean, I can talk about ancient history when the Conservatives were in government; we know what that ancient history looked like. I'm talking about recent history, I'm talking about actual history that is unfolding right here and right now, and they want to repeat it over again to the nth degree.

It is ridiculous, and the people of this province, I think, are smarter than falling for this wrong-headed path. Absolutely, parents are frustrated, New Democrats are frustrated, young people and students are frustrated, and they're worried about their loss of extracurricular activities. I think we all are frustrated. But certainly the way to solve that frustration isn't to ensure that it's ingrained for the next several years with the support of a motion like this that basically does that.

I think parents and students realize that the path that we've been on has not been a successful path. And so I would ask them to think carefully about what the Conservatives are putting forward as they read about it in the papers and hear about it in the news, because, quite frankly, it's a failed strategy. It's a failed strategy and I'm surprised that they have it here. I'm surprised that it's before us. It's absolutely shocking to me, and I don't understand for a minute why it is here. I should take that back; I do understand why it is here. It is here because the path of divisiveness, the path of creating bogeymen and creating monsters and blaming—

Mr. Shafiq Qadri: Scapegoats.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Scapegoats; thank you, Dr. Qadri. I'm sorry, the member for—

Mr. Shafiq Qadri: Etobicoke North.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: —Etobicoke North. That's the interest of this political party in terms of how they think they can gain support from the people of Ontario. I think the people of Ontario deserve a politics that's a higher level than that. I think they deserve governance that's a higher level than that. I think they deserve a level of respect that is greater than what this motion reflects, Speaker. And I would say on behalf of New Democrats that we will proudly be voting against this motion. We don't want more chaos; we want less.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate? The Minister of Education.

Hon. Liz Sandals: I'm pleased to be able to respond to the motion that we have before us today by the member from Nepean–Carleton.

I must say, Speaker, that the member starts off well, because she starts off that "In the opinion of this House, Ontario students and their parents deserve a world-class education system with the best and the brightest teachers." You know, we agree; that first line, we're good. We're in line. We agree with that first line. In fact, that is why we have invested in our schools so that our children do get the education they need to compete for high-skilled jobs in a new economy.

1620

If you look at the investments we've made, funding is up 45% since 2003. We have 13,400 new teachers in our schools since 2003, supporting our students, teaching our students, which means of course that we have smaller classes. Some 91% of primary classes now have 20 or fewer students; compare that to 31% in 2003.

Our full-day kindergarten program is the first of its kind, and we will continue to roll it in so that by 2014, 250,000 four- and five-year-olds in the province of Ontario will in fact have a full-day kindergarten program.

Now, if all we were doing was putting money in—but we're also getting results out. The results of our investments, the results of the good work that our teachers are doing in our schools and working with the students—the good results are actually something that we should be celebrating.

So if you look at our secondary schools, the number of people that are graduating, the graduating rate in our secondary schools is up 14% since 2003. Some 82% of our students are now graduating from secondary school. Now, do we want that to get better? Absolutely. There's more work we can do, but we've come a long way in the last decade in terms of the number of students who have graduated from high school, and that's a result of the partnership with our secondary teachers and focusing in on supporting the secondary students so that they can graduate from high school.

If we look at elementary school overall, 70% of the students—when you sort of combine the EQAO results—in grades 3 and 6 are reaching this provincial standard. Again, up 16%, from 54%, which is where it was 10 years ago. Again, that's as a result of the close partnership that we've had with our elementary teachers in terms of working very hard, especially on literacy, and making sure that our elementary students have that foundation in literacy.

One of the things that doesn't actually always come out fully when you look at those results is that if you look at what we call English-language learners, which are the students who have English as something—it's not their first language. If you look at that group, 30% of them are now meeting the provincial standard, which again is a significant improvement and quite exciting when you think that those are the kids who are coming into our schools not knowing English and who have to first of all learn the language, the fact that they're now actually achieving the provincial standard in that new language.

Now, what we often hear from the opposition is that those comments are based on the EQAO results and that

somehow because the agency that does that testing is a provincial agency, it lacks credibility, which I would dispute. In fact the Auditor General has looked at the agency and actually has said that it is quite independent and doing a good job.

Leave aside the opinion of the Auditor General, what is interesting is that when you look at other third party evaluators, when you look at pan-Canadian testing, when you look at the international testing conducted by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, the OECD, when you look at those other organizations, they in fact tell the same story about the improvement in our schools over the past decade.

If you look at the pan-Canadian testing, you find that Ontario has the only students in Canada who achieve above the national average in math, in reading and in science. We're the only province, according to the pan-Canadian testing methodology, that is above the provincial average in every one of those subjects, and that's because of the good work that our teachers are doing in our schools—and the other education support workers who work in our schools.

If you look at PISA, which is the OECD tester, and look at their results, they tell you that if you look at reading results around the world, Ontario—not just Canada, but specifically Ontario—has some of the best reading results for our elementary kids in the entire world. Again, that's got to do with the partnership that we have with our teachers; we have all worked together very hard to achieve those results.

If you look at a recent view by McKinsey and Co., they found that Ontario's school system was among the best in the world, which is why we actually have people coming from all over the world to talk to Ontario about how we have achieved those results.

If you look at some of the ways in which we've achieved those results—we talked about full-day kindergarten and the wonderful results that we're getting from the introduction of full-day kindergarten. But if you look at the secondary system, you also see things like specialist high-skills majors; co-op programs, which have been expanded; and the dual-credit programs, where we're working not just with the kids who are in the academic stream and going on to university or college, but we're also putting a greater emphasis—which we need to continue to do—on those students who may be going directly to the workplace and who maybe need a more skills-based education.

I am very proud of the accomplishments that our school system has been able to achieve with co-operation, working with our teachers and implementing the programs and really focusing on this: How do we have the best education system in the world?

What about the content of the actual motion? If we look at the motion, it suggests that we need to address the whole area of extracurricular activities. That is true; we do, because we know that what builds a good, positive school climate—what enriches and in fact often becomes the focal point of a student's educational experience—is the fact that they have access to extracurricular activities.

We know that there are thousands of teachers in Ontario who want to deliver extracurricular activities because those teachers get satisfaction from delivering extracurricular activities; because those teachers understand, as do we, that it's the connections that a student makes on a personal level with a teacher in those extracurricular activities that allow them to focus on something they really like doing. It's often those personal connections that make the difference in the life of a student and allow that student to put up with some courses that they may not like, and to have some purpose and to make sure that they actually do graduate from high school. We understand the importance of those extracurricular activities, and we want to get those extracurricular activities back in our schools, because we agree: They're a very valuable part of the school experience in Ontario schools.

What we totally disagree with is the way that the official opposition thinks we should use to get there. We totally disagree with their strategy.

We have a different strategy. Our strategy is to focus on a collaborative approach with our teachers. Our approach is to rebuild that relationship and to build a new, more positive relationship which allows us to look at: How do we co-operatively move forward together in bringing a more positive climate back to Ontario schools?

1630

We know that we will get further ahead by working together with our teachers and building on the good work that we have done together in the past. We know that working together is the way that we can move forward. In fact, we've had a lot of discussions. We've had discussions about: How can we make the collective bargaining system better? How can we restructure the collective bargaining system so that it reflects today's reality? How can we revise the collective bargaining structure so that the government, which is the funder, and the school boards, which are the employers, and the unions, which represent the teachers and the education support workers—how can we revise that system so that we are all together at the table in a way that makes sense? Quite frankly, the legislation that controls school board collective bargaining at the moment doesn't make a whole lot of sense. We need to fix it, and then we need to be committed to using it. We, too, believe that the best way of solving problems, even difficult problems—and believe me, Speaker, we are going to continue to have difficult fiscal problems, because we still have a very large deficit to climb our way out of. So it isn't that collective bargaining is going to become easier in the future. But what we do think is that we need to have a system that will allow us to have a collective bargaining system that actually works and then we are committed to using that collective bargaining system with our partners: the teachers, the support workers and the school boards of the province. It's very important that we also have the school boards, which ultimately are responsible for implementing everything. We need their input at the

table. They're the employers. We need them. So that's where we believe we need to go.

I'm very pleased to report, as I think everybody knows, that the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation provincial council—all the local presidents—did in fact vote to lift the ban on extracurricular activities in the schools. We're looking forward to seeing those extracurricular activities begin to increase. They are already coming back. Over the next few weeks, we're looking to see those extracurricular activities starting to return to our schools.

What about the actual content of the motion? First, or maybe last on the list—I'm starting at the bottom here and working up—there's a suggestion that we should repeal all aspects of the fair hiring regulation. We reject that. There have been problems in some Ontario school boards in the way in which new teachers and other teachers who want a job are able to access new positions that are posted. In fact, that's the first problem: In some cases, the positions have not even been posted. This regulation requires that teaching positions be posted. Well, that seems to me perfectly reasonable. I was a school board trustee for 15 years, and we certainly posted vacant positions and accepted applications and then we went on to do the interviews. Posting these positions so everybody knows who's there is a reasonable thing to do.

What has changed since I was there is that, because we've got declining enrolment, most of the graduates who have come out of teachers' college start off their teaching career by, first of all, being occasional teachers and then going on to become long-term occasional teachers. How we think about hiring has shifted a little bit. We need to think about those students who've come out of the faculties of education and how we make sure that those students who have had an opportunity, or at least who have put in some hard work doing long-term occasional teaching—maybe for a month, often for a full year, Speaker, as you know; often, in the case of secondary for a semester, teaching entire courses. Those young students who are coming out and doing LTO work have good records. They're records that the school boards and the principals in those school boards can have a look at. As they've done LTO work, they can evaluate them. So I would assume that school boards are doing the proper evaluation job as people do long-term occasional postings.

When those jobs are posted, of course we want the people who have long-term occasionals to be eligible to be interviewed for those jobs. But what we do need to know is that the ultimate decision around who's going to be hired is based on not just the seniority on the LTO list; it's based on the qualifications of the teacher, it's based on the safety of students, it's based on the ability to provide the best program, so principals still have a lot of latitude in terms of choosing the best candidate.

The other thing I want to comment on very briefly, as the leader of the third party noted, is that legislating extra duties for teachers is not the way to solve a problem. The Harris government tried to legislate additional duties for

teachers and we spent eight years in an uproar. We're not going there. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon, and I want to congratulate my esteemed colleague from Nepean–Carleton for bringing this motion forward.

Obviously, extracurricular activities are paramount in the development of our young children. I look back fondly on when I was going through the system as a young child, those extra little things that we did after school, whether it be soccer or track and field. The teachers who put out those extra hours of time voluntarily, of their own free will and accord, really made the difference in not only my life, in my decision in going into the field of education, but also in the lives of my young friends growing up.

I'll give you a little example. There was a young lad whom I used to hang around a little bit who was not very academically inclined. He didn't enjoy going to school and had a really hard time getting out of bed in the morning and traversing through the village to get to school. It really pained him to go there. The only thing that actually saved him from dropping out of school was the fact that extracurricular activities were offered at our school.

It pains me to hear the leader of the third party accuse the Progressive Conservative Party of not caring about students in this province or the parents of those students. I have two young daughters myself who are in the education system. My wife is a teacher. We care about the young people of this province and where they're going to be in the years to come, preparing them for the global economy of the 21st century. In the Progressive Conservative Party, in the province of Ontario, we want to have the best education system in the world. When I hear the leader of the third party say that we don't care, I take a little offence to that.

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I have to say as well, when I was teaching for 13 years at the Campbellford District High School—history and English—I also did extracurricular activities. I coached the high school hockey team as well as the soccer team. It is important, connecting those dots, Madam Speaker, as you're well aware yourself, with those students who aren't academically inclined, but you get to see a different side of those students. You get to build relationships that do come into the classroom because you build that bond, that relationship, and they want to do better for you.

I'll give you an example, Madam Speaker. I had a young lad on my hockey team, again, who wasn't very academically inclined; didn't like going to school. I had him in my English class, and he was really struggling. Not that you had to have 80s to be on the hockey team, but you had to at least put forth a good effort to stay there. This young lad, once we got him on the ice and playing, and I built up that relationship with him, it transcended itself to the classroom. By the end of that

semester, I'm happy to say that that young person who was struggling and didn't put forth a great effort at the beginning of the semester, by the end of the semester finished in the top 10 of the class.

I have to say as well that what the member from Nepean–Carleton, Tim Hudak and our party are trying to establish as well is the defining role and establishing parameters for what a teacher's job description is. I think this is important. I fondly reflect, when I went for my first job interview and I was asked specifically by the panel of three principals, "Would you be willing to do extracurricular activities?" Well, of course, I said, "Yes. I'm enthusiastic. I'm young. I'm looking for a job," and I did. So it was sort of already an expectation or a part of the definition of what a responsible, professional teacher would do.

I think it's reasonable, what's being outlined in this motion. It's reasonable. These are the expectations that we have for a higher standard of professionals in the teaching profession, and I'm proud to say that the Progressive Conservative Party are the ones who are actually bringing this forward to address this issue.

The last few months have been quite disturbing, not just for ourselves here in the chamber because we haven't been here but for the parents and the students of this province who have not had extracurricular activities, who are depending on scholarships to get into universities and colleges, and bursaries based on programming and extracurriculars. Those students are suffering, and why? Because the union bosses have pushed their own agenda. What I find disturbing is that this agenda—it's funny, when I hear the new backdoor deals that the new Premier has made with OSSTF—we did ask this morning, "What is going on behind those closed deals? What have you done? How much have you given them or promised them in future?"

Mr. Bill Walker: What's it going to cost?

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: What is it going to cost? Exactly.

We have great concerns because Ken Coran, president of OSSTF, said himself, "About 20% of teachers will not be going back and doing extracurricular activities." I find that appalling. I can't believe that somebody in the teaching profession would actually—after being told and dictated to by the unions that they can't do extracurricular activities, and now they're lifting that ban—say, "No, we're still not going to engage in extracurricular activities." To those individuals in the teaching profession, I'd like to say today that I'm ashamed. They know better. They should be in it for the right reasons. The reason I am here today on this side of the House, with the Progressive Conservative Party, is because this Liberal government and their policies in the last 10 years have made the education system in this province a mockery—a mockery. They claim that they have higher graduations. They do, because they've fudged the statistics. There's a thing called credit recovery, and I'd like to elaborate sometime on that.

But the motion that we've brought forward is very clear on what we're doing, which is standing up for the

rights of students here in the province of Ontario. I think, because I do come from the teaching profession, Madam Speaker—I've been on the front lines, I've actually seen what is going on in our classrooms, I've seen the policies that have been brought down, and that's why I'm here. I gave up a great pension to come here.

With reference to the third party: It's nice to finally see the third party become engaged in the education debate here in the province of Ontario.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Yes, welcome aboard; it's good to see you.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: They're welcome. They've stood by for the last several months and haven't addressed the issue that concerns, but it's nice to see that they are here now. It's nice to see that they're supporting their unions and the money that they're hoping will fill their coffers should there be an election in the near future.

I think, however, that my esteemed colleagues here and myself are very proud of the fact that we've brought this motion forward. We're taking a stand, and we will continue to take a stand for the students and the parents of this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, this has been a bad year for education in Ontario, and this resolution will make it worse. I don't want things to get worse. Students and parents don't want them to get worse. Teachers and education workers—ditto. You can't understand why this resolution has to be defeated without looking at what's happened in the last 12 months.

Last August, the Liberals called back the House to pass Bill 115. We were told it was necessary to ensure that schools opened on time and stayed open: peace in our schools, peace in our times, all with the simple passage of this bill. L'été passé, les libéraux ont dit que le projet de loi 115 était nécessaire pour avoir de la stabilité dans nos écoles. Ce n'était pas vrai.

Bill 115 was a politically motivated bill, put in place to win a by-election in Kitchener-Waterloo. It failed on two counts: It didn't bring so-called peace to our education system, and it ensured a third place finish for the Liberals in the by-election, not a victory.

Why did that bill fail? In part, because it put narrow political considerations first and the interests of students and parents last. Why did it fail? In part, because it treated teachers and education workers as targets, not partners—it treated them as targets who could be bullied to political advantage, whose democratic rights could be trampled without political cost to the Conservatives or the Liberals.

What it did—and many predicted this at the time—was it sparked anger and demoralization on the part of teachers and education workers. So, in turn, instead of bringing stability to our schools, it brought conflict and disruption to our students and our families.

Given what we're going through with the aftermath of Bill 115 in our schools, why would anyone want to make

it worse? Why would we want to go through another round of "My way or the highway," as is proposed in this resolution? We have been down this path before, with similar results.

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Writer George Santayana said, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." So let's take a moment, Madam Speaker, to remember the past. During the Harris-Eves era, there was ongoing conflict in our schools. Many forget this. The resolution we debate today was the heart of Bill 74, introduced in the year 2000 to deal with declining levels of extracurriculars, or co-curriculars, as some call them. It had the same goal as this resolution: to simply change the job descriptions for teachers to make co-curriculars compulsory. It was a futile and unenforceable initiative but with substantial consequences.

In 2001, the Report of the Minister's Advisory Group on the Provision of Co-instructional Activities addressed the issue. Appointed by the Progressive Conservative government, the group interviewed people across Ontario and looked at how the issue of co-curriculars was dealt with in Quebec, Manitoba and New York.

Let me read a few crucial paragraphs from the background of the study on pages 3 and 4, because anyone who takes part in this debate today, anyone who's watching this on television, should be aware of what we have already found out in this province:

"In the past few years, teachers' unions in some of Ontario's district school boards have withdrawn from leading and participating in co-instructional activities as a bargaining tactic, to influence the outcome of collective negotiations. At present, most boards in Ontario do not offer their students a full range of co-instructional activities. In June 2000, the government introduced the Education Accountability Act (Bill 74), which included provisions for the accountability of school boards, limitations on average class sizes, and the minimum teaching assignments of classroom teachers in secondary schools. After the introduction of Bill 74, levels of co-instructional activity dropped in most schools." After the introduction of a coercive measure, even more teachers withdrew from co-instructional activities. "In some schools, co-instructional activities have ceased completely. All boards and schools report that the quality of the co-instructional activities that are offered has suffered significantly."

They go on, and I think this paragraph is useful for our understanding: "The situation across the province is deteriorating, even in the few schools that have so far managed to maintain traditional levels of co-instructional activity. Principals of these schools told us that they do not believe they can continue to maintain these levels in the next school year. In fact, everyone with whom we spoke expressed a sense of great urgency about resolving the issue."

Madam Speaker, the resolution that has come forward today is an echo of what the Progressive Conservatives have done in the past: an attempt to unilaterally redefine

the job descriptions of those who teach in our schools. Just within the last eight months, the Liberals tried it with Bill 115 and put us in the mess that we find ourselves in today. This approach has hurt our students, hurt our families, hurt our schools. It has mistreated our teachers and our education workers. Making it worse is not a good idea, not defensible, not wanted, and this motion will make things worse.

I've had a chance to talk to parents in my riding who've had to deal with the fallout from this conflict. Parents from Frankland school, Wilkinson, Leslieville, R.H. McGregor and many others have spoken to me about the need for a resolution. Teachers and education workers who live in my riding have talked to me on their doorsteps and at public meetings about the need for a resolution.

I just want to correct something right here, Madam Speaker. I have to say that the actions of the teachers in their federations have reflected the mood and attitude of teachers in their homes. Teachers and education workers were mistreated, feel mistreated and are angry. Don't think that the attitude of the teachers' federations is different from their members'. In fact, it reflects them pretty well.

This motion is not going to give us, our students, our families, our teachers, our education workers or our schools the resolution that they need and that they want. This motion is the political equivalent of the movie Groundhog Day, which leads us into an endless cycle of bullying and disruption.

One of the "whereas" clauses of the resolution reads "despite enacting and then repealing Bill 115 ... the government has not been able to ensure stability in Ontario's schools." Madam Speaker, Bill 115 was never going to bring stability into Ontario's schools. That wasn't its primary purpose. It was a tool that could not deliver, because, in fact, it simply caused disruption. We forgot history. The Liberals and the Conservatives, working together, ignored history and put us in a situation of conflict and disruption.

Going further with this motion, unilaterally rewriting the job description and duties of teachers, won't make things better; it will simply make them bitter. So I ask you and everyone in this chamber to reject this resolution and to take a different course. Students want normal life restored to schools. Parents want things to settle down so that students can get the full school experience, an experience that motivates and inspires them. For parents and students, the importance of education is far beyond a simple service—for parents, because we're talking about their children; for students, because we're talking about their future.

A lot is riding on the daily experience in schools. Those who teach, those who counsel students with difficult personal problems, those who look after our children in kindergarten or provide support to special-needs students want their democratic rights respected and to have an agreement on their working conditions settled by honest negotiation and give-and-take, not an approach of "my way or the highway."

With this resolution, no one will get what they want and what this province needs. There isn't a parent listening who would disagree when I say that students who feel good about their learning place, whose morale is high, who feel respected—all will agree that students in that situation will excel. The same is true for those who teach our children and provide them with support services. A demoralized workforce, told repeatedly that they are the problem with our education system, will have the same problems as our students in performing to their full potential.

We're not talking about metal stamping plants here. We're talking about raising the next generation, instilling skills and attitudes that will serve them well for their whole lives. It is not a simple task. If you've talked to a group of children, if you've tried to get them going in the same direction, think about doing that with 20 or more. It is complex. It requires training. It requires extraordinary resources of strength to do it properly. The only durable and realistic way to ensure that our schools function the way we want is through respect all around.

This is a very difficult thing to work through. Parents see difficulties now and want a solution now. The motion before us claims to offer a solution. However, our experience of the past year and our experience 15 years ago make it clear that this is not a solution; it is a dead end. C'est clair, de notre histoire, que cette motion ne donne pas de solution; ça donne seulement une impasse.

That takes me back to that very interesting report of the Minister's Advisory Group on the Provision of Co-instructional Activities. They didn't just report on the problems of the time, but made a series of observations and recommendations.

Observations first: They looked at what they called the key challenges to provision of co-curricular activities. Based on talks with school boards and other education partners, they identified three key areas that had to be addressed.

1700

The first obstacle to resumption of co-curriculars was a lack of respect for teaching and teachers. The advisory group reported what they heard time and again, that the lack of respect demoralized teachers, caused stress and discouraged them from giving more. This motion will not correct that kind of problem.

All of us have had the experience of working for a bad boss, a boss who felt that the best was achieved by treating people badly. All of us know how that has personally affected our morale or the morale of friends. We know how we've been affected when our job conditions have been unilaterally changed on us. That is what tens of thousands of education workers and teachers are going through. We know from personal experience that more of the same is not going to make things better. That was what the minister's advisory group heard all over the province.

The second obstacle was simply the burden of new tasks being added on to teachers' days as new curriculum methods and reporting were added to the day. There was

less time in the day for the teachers to do co-curriculars. Teachers don't simply walk out of the building at 3:20 or 3:30. They have marking, planning, training to do. There is a limit to the amount of time in a day. If in fact it's recommended that the job descriptions be varied, then one has to say, where are we going to take things away? What is it that's going to be undone when we add on this extra work?

The third obstacle noted by the advisory group was the provision of resources. Simply put, at the time there was no allocation of funds from the province for extracurriculars, and apparently there still is none. I spent a lot of time at school fundraisers and fun fairs. Parents, teachers, education workers and students work hard to raise the money for extracurricular activities. If this motion is serious, is there an allocation in here for the resources to carry through on those extracurriculars?

The task force appointed by the Conservatives that reported in 2001 looked at co-curriculars in New York, in Quebec and in Manitoba. In Quebec at the time, extracurricular activities were facilitated by giving teachers time off work for work that was done outside school hours or paying extra. Manitoba allowed time off or directly paid teachers to provide extracurriculars. In Rochester, New York, teachers were paid for extracurricular work. In Ontario, we're not paying for extracurricular work, and frankly, then and now, no one is recommending that these activities be anything other than voluntary.

The advisory group made a series of recommendations. Amongst them was a recommendation that there needed to be a better definition of the duties and responsibilities of teachers. Note well that in their recommendations, they spoke strongly against a unilateral imposition. They saw that as fruitless, as a dead end for the education system. They were right then; they're right now.

They also recommended that co-instructional activities remain voluntary for teachers and that the part of Bill 74 that would have made them mandatory be withdrawn. They understood that dictating conditions of work was counterproductive, undermining what we wanted in schools. They did note that an option for the province, if they felt so strongly about extracurriculars, was to pay people for the extra time they put in.

The motion before us ignores history, ignores the minister's advisory group report from 2001. It deepens the mess that we're in. If we want a return to stability and civility in our schools, we need respect for our students and for those who teach them.

Speaker, we need to defeat this motion. The government needs to rebuild its relationship with teachers and education workers, a relationship they have damaged so badly. We need to get on with the life of this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Scarborough—Agincourt.

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to rise following the Minister of Education to speak on this proposed motion, and I want to address the issue: First and foremost, no one in this House does not support our students.

Furthermore, no one in this House should be saying that we don't have the best public education in the English-speaking world. That's why my family came to Canada—so don't shake your head—that's the reason why my family came to Canada. Let me remind everybody of that.

The other piece here: I am very, very mindful of my responsibility as a member of provincial Parliament. The fact that this proposed motion—the tone and language we must be concerned about. First and foremost, I am extremely distressed. After everybody said we should be working together, to be collaborative, to be supportive, to build on—we earlier talked about rising above, yet we have this motion before the House.

I also want to remind everybody of the fact that this motion is a reaction to all the conflicts that we recently experienced. So if we're going to be talking about responding to concerns, we should be proactive, working together collaboratively instead of accusing certain union leaders of doing this and that and what have you, and hurting the students.

Furthermore, I am also concerned about the suggestion that the government should "introduce legislation that will amend a teacher's job description." I have never, in my professional career as a registered nurse, seen a Legislature that should write a job description for my job as a registered nurse. How respectful is that for a professional? Unheard of. I don't know where that came from. The fact that we can legislate goodwill about this whole issue about extracurricular activities—last time, I heard that we work together to resolve concerns and issues.

The other piece I have a great deal of concern about is the fact that, in this motion, it talks about referring to the Ministry of Labour to investigate and levying fines. I don't know what the fine is—the amount, the content or the whole piece—using another ministry to address so-called illegal labour action.

The other piece of the motion that I'm also concerned about is referring and reporting to the college of teachers for "workplace harassment." Now I don't know about you, but the last time I had to deal with some issues dealing with the college of teachers, they have not been able to address many of the investigations on various types of abuse. Now we are asking, through this motion, to have this matter be referred to another regulatory body to deal with teachers' issues.

Then the other piece that I'm also very distressed about is that the member from Nepean—Carleton focused on regulation 274/12 about the concern about seniority etc.—and regulation 274/12 talks about fair hiring practices, about the whole issue of transparency and accountability. Why isn't she specifically targeting the seniority piece, about the whole issue of fair hiring practices? That's what the regulation is about.

So, at the end of the day, we are sincere in our efforts, working collaboratively, communicating effectively together in the Legislature, but also working with our parties. We must defeat this particular motion. Thank you for this opportunity.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Rod Jackson: It's my pleasure to stand here and contribute to my colleague's motion on extracurricular and co-curricular activities and teachers' duties.

I must thank the member from Nepean–Carleton for bringing forward this important motion. Our young Ontarians in primary and secondary school represent the future of Ontario. I have two children of my own, a young boy and a young girl, who are also in the school system. I'm a father and a parent, and I understand exactly what the challenges are that our children are facing. Let's not make any mistake. What this motion does is for kids, first and foremost. We can't forget that.

1710

I'm very pleased to be able to speak to the motion and cover many of the reasons why this motion is so important, and the teachers that administer them are critically important to the well-being of our students. That's why the addition of extracurricular activities must be included in the responsibilities of our teachers on a daily, weekly, monthly, yearly basis.

The Liberal government has long prided itself on its education legacy. The legacy is one of mismanagement, frankly, and my colleague's motion that I'm speaking on today is just one step towards correcting the failures of the past 10 years of this Liberal government.

I'd like to lead off a little bit with how we wound up in this mess in the first place and why our kids are paying for the Liberals' union dispute—a little history. The students of Ontario have been paying for the mismanaged labour relations between the Liberal government and its corresponding unions for some time. Coming from a mediation and labour relations background myself, I'm particularly disappointed that children are being used as bargaining chips in this dispute.

You have to ask how we got here. Well, remember that last August, a frantic Liberal government recalled the Legislature several weeks early in a big emergency to push through emergency legislation known as Bill 115 to make sure that kids could go back to school in September. The bill didn't even pass until after they went back to school—let's be clear about that. Bill 115 was a Liberal-created wedge issue, dreamt up to win a by-election in Kitchener–Waterloo. Not only did this not pan out, but it actually created strikes and an ongoing work-to-rule campaign by unions by inflaming the same unions that have been floating you guys through the past 10 years in government.

The only people paying for it now are the children and their parents, who pay some of the highest taxes ever under the Liberals and expect some of the highest-quality education to match, but that has not happened. The Ontario PCs have been clear and honest with Ontarians from the beginning, advocating for a wage freeze across the entire public sector over the last year and to get Ontario's debt and deficit under control. Had the government simply treated all professions in the public sector fairly in the first place, we wouldn't have this work-to-

rule. Our priority has been, and will continue to be, to ensure that students are in the classroom, receiving the best education possible, full stop.

After promising that Bill 115 would prevent chaos in our schools, it actually created the opposite. The effects are felt to this day after a recall of that legislation. To be clear, it was a baby step toward an across-the-board public sector wage freeze, and as our leader says, half a loaf is better than no loaf at all.

That's why my colleague brings this motion to make extracurriculars a formal part of teaching responsibilities so that students won't wind up the pawns between the Liberal government and their disgruntled union partners. Next time you have something to fight about, don't put kids in between.

So why are we adding extracurriculars to teachers' responsibilities? Well, today the Premier has offered nothing but minimal lip service when it comes to bringing back extracurriculars for students. I agree with my colleagues that there should be no such thing as work-to-rule when it comes to our children's education. There's no time for using children as pawns in our education system.

Extracurriculars are very important. They enrich the learning experience of a child and contribute to their growth as a person, and they contribute to the growth of teachers too. In a report recently released by Statistics Canada, children's participation in organized extracurricular activities was heavily associated with positive short- and long-term outcomes for children between six and 17 years of age. That report also found that students who participated in extracurricular activities, as the member from Northumberland–Quinte West correctly mentioned, achieved higher levels of academic success, with a reduced likelihood of dropping out of school.

So no one can even come close to trying to say that extracurriculars are not a critical part of the teaching profession, period. You just can't say it. You can't separate out teaching from extracurricular activities. They're one and the same. If teachers really want to achieve the goal of educating students to the best of their abilities, extracurricular activities must be a part of it.

The StatsCan report also found that after-school activities increased pro-social behaviours while reducing children's risk of developing emotional or behavioural disorders. Why is that? Well, because they learn how to work within a team environment. They learn about physical education. We know that if you have a healthy body, you also have a healthy mind, and we know that it keeps them out of trouble—busy hands. In short, there's scientific evidence and data to support the notion that extracurricular activities contribute significantly to the development of our children. Participation in these activities helps lead to better time management skills in our children, as they learn to organize their time to account for schooling, homework and other activities. We know that as everybody's lives get busier and busier there's less and less time for some of these extracurricular activities, and we know that many parents

struggle on the days that they're off work or the days that they come home after work to get their kids to baseball practice, to hockey practice or to music lessons. That's what I do. So imagine if that gap can be filled up a little bit—just a little bit—in the school system by our teachers.

When participating in after-school programs such as sports teams and music lessons, students learn about commitment and sportsmanship and the importance of teamwork, all of which are skills important to successful jobs and careers. Probably some of us in here could take lessons from some kids on teamwork and dealing with each other in appropriate manners.

Extracurriculars help raise individuals' self-esteem. They build friendships and solid relationships between students at a time when many students and many adults, for that matter, depend on electronic devices to communicate with one another. Extracurriculars allow them to relate to one another in real terms. If this sort of interpersonal interaction can be helped and can be nurtured, imagine what it could do for bullying when people are actually making compassionate connections with their fellow students and with fellow teachers.

There are countless studies in social psychology, educational research and developmental psychology that show extracurricular activities are critically important to the healthy development of youth. That's why it's not okay to take these activities away, compromising our children's quality of education over a labour dispute between the government and unions. It cheapens our children's education. It's even worse when we hear that unions are intimidating teachers into stopping doing extracurriculars with the threat of fines and shaming them if they do actually contribute to extracurriculars. I can't even tell you how many teachers I've spoken to over the past several months who want to do extracurricular activities but don't want to be fined and don't want to be shamed by their peers. So they're actually shamed into not doing what's right for the kids. Stand there in your spot, look me in the eye and tell me that you believe that is a good thing. Tell me that that's achieving peace.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: It's bullying.

Mr. Rod Jackson: What it is is bullying, as the member from Northumberland–Quinte West mentions. It is bullying.

And you know what? Here's the thing: Every teacher I talk to—just about every one of them; and by the way, they're not all supportive of the unions' position on this—actually wants to be involved in extracurriculars. They actually want to get out there and help coach the basketball team or the hockey team. My daughter plays on her school hockey team; she goes to a Catholic school. Her hockey team actually had a tournament cancelled after all her friends in the public school that they were supposed to play against—they only played one game because if they let the kids play one game—they took all their sweaters back and everything after that first game—they got their standard for their contribution to extracurriculars filled—one game.

Who lives that pain? Those kids made a team, they fought for it, they got on it and were there for one game—not right.

The foundation of our government and legal system is based on the freedom of individuals. If teachers choose to dedicate themselves to the future of Ontario by helping lead extracurricular activities, then no union, no person, no government should stand in their way—none.

I have many teachers who have come to me and have been upset about, like I said, the fines that they have that are going to be levied upon them and the shame that they have for actually helping kids. Fining a teacher for their commitment to their students is just unethical and, frankly, should be illegal.

Further, we need to break down barriers in our parental community and involvement in delivering these programs as well, if teachers can't or won't, in order to further insulate students from political disputes. How many parents have actually put up their hands and said, "Okay. Teachers aren't going to do extracurriculars. We'll do them," only to get kiboshed by the school boards or principals because it causes labour problems? So now we have parents who are willing to give up their time—that is very valuable, as well—to volunteer to do extracurriculars, and they're being told no, they can't do it.

1720

Mr. Bill Walker: There's something wrong.

Mr. Rod Jackson: There's absolutely something wrong.

So it seems that the Premier's inaction on this subject demonstrates her willingness to continue the McGuinty–Wynne legacy of throwing more money towards union leaders to keep them happy.

As former education minister, Premier Wynne's decisions have left the province spending \$8.5 billion more than only a decade ago, even though Ontario has 250,000 less students in our system. Test scores have actually gone down in key areas like math, so to say that we have the best education system in the world is absolutely inaccurate. Are we proud of it? Yes. Can it be better? Absolutely.

Where does the extra money go for less students? Why are scores declining? In a sentence: the epic Liberal bureaucracy. Under the Liberal government, 300,000 public sector jobs were added while 300,000 manufacturing jobs were lost. In fact, the only industry to see growth is the public sector. Other sectors are stagnant or declining, just like our economy—which is no coincidence, I might add.

In my own riding, a constituent, a high school science teacher, tells me how, in the last few years, her high school has had to make significant budget cuts, shrinking the science program and the supplies that she's able to use to teach her students. How is this possible with all the education investment for fewer students? I'll explain, using my own riding as an example. The bureaucracy has built themselves a beautiful Taj Mahal, otherwise known as the Simcoe County District School Board. It's just

outside of Barrie, and they've done this at a time when they're talking about closing the oldest high school in Barrie, Barrie Central Collegiate, because they can't afford to fix the HVAC system there.

Where are your priorities when you build a gorgeous brand new building—by the way, that needed to be retrofitted with its own HVAC system only five or six years after being built, just last year—at the same time when they're talking about closing a school because they can't afford to keep the HVAC system going? This school, by the way, is in the downtown core of Barrie, which has been decimated by a job shortage and manufacturing losses.

When scarce resources get clogged because of a level of bureaucracy, the front line is the first to suffer. This has been very evident in special education, something that's been close to my heart. We see that, while the budget goes up for the school board—which, by the way you do oversee. To abdicate any responsibility for that is absolutely ridiculous when you actually are cutting back on front-end spending for building things like Taj Mahals and cutting back on science spending; when there are kids out there with education assistants that are ill-equipped to deal with children on the front line, so much so that they're being forced to use first-response tools that are meant as a last resort, like blocker pads and padded cells.

My own old school, when I went to elementary school, Portage View Public School in Barrie, had a six-by-six padded cell installed in their old janitor's closet—an old janitor's closet was actually transformed into a calming room. I don't know about you, but getting put in a six-by-six-foot cell with padded walls and no windows, it's not calm. If you want to talk about calming rooms, the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound could probably tell you what a calm room looks like; that's not it. Herding kids around with blocker pads also is inappropriate.

You need to pay attention to what's going on in your school boards, and to abdicate your responsibility in making sure that school boards are doing what's right is absolutely wrong.

Education spending and quality do not necessarily go hand in hand, as the Liberal government may have led you to believe. Today, we're here because another mistake on the education file has further compromised the quality of our children's education and their school experience: no extracurriculars. These extracurricular activities are incredibly important and beneficial for our students. That's why we need this motion today: to ensure that our children always have these options available to them, despite the rancour between government and the unions. Ultimately, children are paying for a labour dispute between the government and its unions, and we need to make sure this never happens again.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Madam Speaker, let's begin with the easy points. First and foremost, we absolutely do not

support this motion. I think that should be said, first and foremost. But again, like my colleague, I think we have to understand a bit of context to understand how simplistic a solution this motion is and how in fact it's illogical. It has no merits and, in fact, it's contradictory to many of the comments that have just been made.

Let's put it into context. Bill 115 was enacted by the Liberals, which was supposed to create stability in the classrooms and clearly did not; in fact, it created chaos in the classrooms. So by enforcing contracts, by legislating contracts on teachers, it created chaos. But somehow, a motion to legislate the job description—that's going to get rid of that chaos. That's absolutely illogical, and I'd like to extend that to say that's ridiculous. How can you take that leap and say that this approach was bad, that this approach to legislate contracts, creating conflict and chaos in our schools was bad, but that the PC approach to legislate the job description and force teachers to do extracurriculars somehow makes a lot of sense? If you just reflect on that for a moment, you can see through it. I hope the viewers at home, I hope the citizens of Ontario can see through this motion and say, "It makes no sense."

We've just heard members of the PC Party stand up and criticize the Liberal bill that they supported, which also doesn't make a lot of sense. They criticize a bill that they stood up and voted for, and then they create a motion which is very similar to the bill that they're criticizing. There's a lot of illogic here. There's a lot of lack of logic here.

What we have here are a motion and a bill which are very linked. What happened with Bill 115 is that it wasn't simply an attack on teachers—and I applaud the teachers for expanding the message. They say that Bill 115 was an attack on workers in the province. I take that a bit further. It's actually an attack on democracy. It's an attack on our human rights.

In the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in Canada, section 2 outlines some of the fundamental freedoms that we all enjoy as Canadians. Of those fundamental freedoms, one of the essential fundamental freedoms is our fundamental freedom of association. Section 2 reads, "Everyone has the following fundamental freedoms...." Section 2(d) is "freedom of association." That freedom was the difference between people enjoying their democratic freedoms and living under totalitarian regimes.

The freedom to associate was one of the key hallmarks of society moving towards progressive societies, an example of people getting together and organizing to oppose regressive regimes. That freedom of association is intrinsically tied to collective bargaining, the rights of people to get together and form associations. So an attack on the collective bargaining rights is an attack on people's right to associate.

What we're seeing here is that the bill that was passed by the Liberals, supported by the PCs, and a motion presented by the PCs—which are both undemocratic, which are attacks on our freedoms—

Hon. James J. Bradley: Like the social contract.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Very much like the social contract.

So Bill 115 wasn't simply an attack on workers, wasn't simply an attack on teachers, an attack on our fundamental freedoms. Le projet de loi 115 n'était pas seulement une attaque contre les droits des syndicats; c'était une attaque contre les droits de la personne. It was an attack on the rights of human beings, the rights that we all enjoy and that we should protect here in this Legislature, instead of legislating against and instead of attacking.

1730

When I look at the education system in Ontario, there are certainly some issues that we have. There are certainly some problems we have that we could tackle. I mean, of all the issues that we could have tackled—we have special-needs funding concerns, classroom size issues. There are certain community schools which are closing, leaving communities without a school. There are many issues that could have been raised, and the thought that the PC Party chose their opposition day to create this illogical argument, this self-contradictory motion, just seems like a waste of time.

There are so many other issues that could have been addressed: looking at mental health issues in the schools, looking at special needs. I had indicated earlier, in May, that People for Education reported that 80% of elementary schools in eastern Ontario have caps on the number of students that can be assessed with special needs. Student-teacher ratios for special education have increased by 50% since 2001. I mean, there are such serious issues that we could be talking about today that would work towards creating a better province.

One of the issues that has been raised recently—we talk about inequality, and inequality exists in our society; disparity of income exists in our society. An issue that is particularly concerning is the inequality of opportunity, that even opportunities are unequal, depending on where you live. If students from particular communities do not have the same resources, the same access to resources as other students, literally, their abilities to access opportunities are different. Their abilities to succeed in society are different, based on where they live. These are some serious, pressing issues that we could talk about. This inequality of opportunity, the fact that where you live and what school you go to will impact your ability to access higher education, access further employment, is a serious concern we should be looking at. Let's work on addressing the inequality of opportunity and have some more meaningful opposition day motions, as opposed to self-contradictory motions that are absolutely illogical.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Hon. Jeff Leal: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a great privilege to have the opportunity to address this issue this afternoon.

I want to reflect for a bit on the great education experience I've had in Peterborough. I think it was somewhat unique. I went to the public system for kindergarten. I

then went to St. John the Baptist Elementary School at the south end of Peterborough, and then, after that, I went to Kenner Collegiate.

Of course, one of the unique things about those two experiences was certainly the provision of extracurricular activities. Madam Speaker, I always found it very interesting, as I was taught by the Sisters of St. Joseph in elementary school particularly, that they were phenomenal sports coaches, because I think they used to have divine intervention from time to time in order for us to succeed. I'll always remember the saying of those rosaries to help us out.

Then I got to Kenner Collegiate and of course experienced wonderful teachers. Many of them I still see in Peterborough today. They've retired and they are still contributing to the community because of that sense of passion that they developed in providing extracurricular activities during my high school days.

But, you know, I'm very familiar with teaching. I want to talk about a very special teacher in my life, who is my wife, Karan. She taught in the classroom for some 22 years. She spent her summers going to Queen's University on a part-time basis to get her master's degree in education, and when she completed her master's degree in education, she then went to the University of Ottawa to do her principal papers and her supervisory papers, and of course we're very pleased today that she went on to a position of vice-principal, and now she's a principal at St. Patrick school in Peterborough, doing an incredible job providing that great framework for her students to prosper in that kind of environment. What time is it? It's 5:30. I know she's home. She has probably just left school two minutes ago, so she's now tuning in to the Legislature. I hope she is watching this afternoon.

Madam Speaker, when you look at the kind of progress that we've made in the last decade in Ontario, it's phenomenal. You know, Arne Duncan, Barack Obama's education secretary, came to Ontario on three occasions to see what we're doing right here in the province of Ontario. Arne Duncan looked at small class sizes. He looked at full-day kindergarten. You know what, Madam Speaker? Those elements were put into the Democratic platform during the most recent presidential election because the president said that full-day kindergarten and small class sizes achieve success in a public education system.

Our collective work with all our partners over the last decade has made Ontario's two families of publicly funded education in the top five in the OECD countries, something that we can all be proud of, something we should all be proud of on all sides of this House, because we made such progress together.

I look at the kinds of agreements that we've achieved over the last 10 months in the province of Ontario. We got agreements with college professors and lecturers in the province of Ontario. We got agreements with AMAPCEO, which is the management group of the Ontario public service. We got agreements with the OMA, the Ontario Medical Association. We got agree-

ments with OPSEU, those phenomenal men and women who provide public services each and every day to the people of the province of Ontario.

We were able to get agreements with the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association, and indeed the French-language teachers' association. And now there's some talk about secret backroom deals? The Premier and the Minister of Education have been very upfront. We're engaging OSSTF, we're engaging ETFO, because we know how important extracurricular activities are to the full education experience for people in the province of Ontario. We'll continue to have those talks, and we'll continue to make progress because that's what's so important right here in the province of Ontario.

Indeed, as I said, when people are looking for good ideas in public education today, they don't go to British Columbia; they don't go to Alberta; they don't go to Saskatchewan. Where do they come, ladies and gentlemen? They come to Ontario. As a former great Premier of this province would say—William Grenville Davis—a place to stand, a place to grow, and when it comes to education, everybody comes to Ontari-ari-ari-o, and that's so important. That's so important.

I hear from my NDP friend—let's have a little history there. I remember them talking about some teachers back in 1995. Remember that social contract? Twelve unpaid days of leave. Madam Speaker, here's what they did to collective agreements in the province of Ontario, just like that. They were done. They ripped them up.

Our process was to negotiate and continue to negotiate to get those kinds of collective agreements.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Continue.

Hon. Jeff Leal: I think my time is up, so thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Harris: I'm pleased to have this short opportunity to speak to the motion by the member for Nepean–Carleton. She has done an excellent job, providing a voice to students—in fact, the only voice on behalf of parents and students in this province who are unfortunately left out of the unions' decision to remove extracurriculars from our schools.

What troubles me and my colleagues most about this issue is that the unions decided to deprive students of their after-school sports and clubs without even considering the effect it would have on their educational experience.

Many of the students in my community—I want to commend two, in fact, who came to me when this unsettling dispute arose. Erica Boer and Taylor Cloutier, both students at Huron Heights high school, did everything that they could do to bring their favourite sports and activities back. Unfortunately, it was only the Ontario PC caucus, under the leadership of Lisa MacLeod, that was truly the only one speaking up for those students and parents.

So I'm proud to stand up today on behalf of Erica and Taylor to say yes to this motion. I thank the member for bringing it forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

1740

Mr. Bob Delaney: Speaker, the day is ending and the moon is nearing full and today is an opposition day motion, so you know that something unworkable and political is coming, and the question is whether it drifts into the realm of the ridiculous.

Now, I have to say, Speaker, that I thank our colleague from Nepean–Carleton for having brought this motion forward. I thank her because it's a chance for our government to keep talking with our teachers. I thank her because it gives Ontarians a chance to see, up close and personal, what the Ontario PC Party now stands for.

In the US states that have adopted the very right-to-work, anti-labour legislation that the Hudak PCs are advocating, skilled workers are on their way out and the GDP in those states is dropping, even as America begins its economic recovery.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I ask the member to stay within the context of today's motion.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Speaker, that's where the Hudak PCs propose to take Ontario. They'll start by slashing 2,000 teaching jobs as class sizes rise, and they'll fire 10,000 early childhood educators, and as many as 10,000 staff support jobs are going to be lost in Ontario's schools. But that's just a start, and it's in their Conservative white paper on education.

Whenever Conservatives really need to shore up their political base, they know that they can do it by just poking a sharp stick at Ontario's teachers. It has always worked for them and they think that it always will.

Liberals have a different approach. Liberals think that Ontario is in a race for the top and that education, to us, is an investment whose returns we want to maximize. To Conservatives, education is an expense that they want to minimize, cut or, even better, privatize.

Speaker, where in the English-speaking world can you get the best quality education? It isn't in any right-to-work state and it's not even in the private school system. You get the best-quality primary and secondary school education in the English-speaking world in Ontario public and Catholic schools, English or French, and you get that world-class education from Ontario teachers—Ontario teachers who bargain collectively with their government.

While Ontario and its teachers have had their issues in the most recent round of collective bargaining, this Conservative vision of a second-class, third-rate education system reminds all of us of what we've worked together to build in the past decade. And here's what we've been working to build: accepting schools, where every type of student can study in peace and security; a school system that the rest of the world comes to Ontario to study and to emulate—the Americans are asking themselves in their education system, "What is going on

in Ontario, and how do we do what they're doing?"—the ability of families to give their youngest children a head start through full-day kindergarten; new schools, and schools that in the past decade have been upgraded to 21st-century standards.

Over and above what goes on in the classroom, teachers want to impart their values and their skills to their students outside school hours. This motion would make such extracurricular activities mandatory and force them down teachers' throats. That's not how people like to be treated. That's not the way this province has dealt with teachers. That's not the way Ontario has built the best public school system in the English-speaking world. That's not why kids come here to get an education. We wouldn't take extracurricular activities, as a government, and force them down teachers' throats. That's why this province and its teachers are able to come back together again and remember what brought us together and what we came together to build in the first place.

Extracurriculars work best when they come from the heart. Now they can come again voluntarily and come from the heart again, right here in the province of Ontario.

Speaker, one of the most enlightening things in the last two weeks has been to watch President Obama's State of the Union address. To hear that, it sounds as if parts of it were simply lifted right from the government of Ontario's agenda in the past decade. What would President Obama like to see in America's schools? He'd like to see Ontario's school system. He'd like to see full-day kindergarten. He'd like to see the kind of education system that Ontario has been building here for the past 10 years; the kind that has kids abroad asking their parents, "Can I go abroad and do my high school in Ontario?", the kind that has parents calling our school boards and saying, "Can I have my son or daughter come to Ontario and study here among your kids?"; the kind that's made our school system the envy of the world.

Now, Speaker, the difference here between this motion and the policy of our government is that this government won't be cutting hundreds of teaching jobs in Toronto—

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Point of order.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I just want the member maybe to perhaps withdraw the comment, because it just came across CTV that, indeed, his government is cutting hundreds of jobs at the Toronto District School Board to deal with—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Member, continue.

Mr. Bob Delaney: I'm not exactly sure what the member from Nepean–Carleton is talking about, because I'm here speaking to an important motion that she raised, and I'm not in the backroom watching television. I'm here talking about education in Ontario, and I'm here talking about why our teachers are the best teachers in

the world, why they'll voluntarily come back to doing their extracurricular activities, and that's what this motion is about.

They may want to fudge the issue. They may want to get sidetracked but, to us, it's about one thing. It's about just one thing. It's about the best possible education in the province of Ontario. That's what this government has delivered for eight years. That's what this government will continue to deliver, and whatever decision school boards may make, that's what our government's focus is—the best possible school system that this province can deliver. It depends on goodwill with the men and women who make up the teaching profession; goodwill that we've worked hard to engender, build, foster and nurture for nine years; goodwill that we have a chance to rebuild, a chance to come back together again.

That's what's made education in the province of Ontario great. That's why one of the great education ministers in this province's history, Bill Davis, is one of our biggest fans. That's why he supported us in some of the things that we've done here in the province of Ontario. I believe in that vision that Bill Davis started. I believe in that vision that Dalton McGuinty continued, and I believe in the vision that a great Minister of Education, the new Premier Kathleen Wynne, will continue, now and for a long time in the future. Thank you very much, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you.

Ms. MacLeod has moved opposition day motion number one. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1749 to 1759.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Would all members please take their seats.

Ms. MacLeod has moved opposition day number one. All those in favour of the motion please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnett, Ted	Jackson, Rod	O'Toole, John
Bailey, Robert	Jones, Sylvia	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Barrett, Toby	Leone, Rob	Pettapiece, Randy
Chudleigh, Ted	MacLaren, Jack	Scott, Laurie
Clark, Steve	MacLeod, Lisa	Shurman, Peter
Dunlop, Garfield	McDonell, Jim	Smith, Todd
Elliott, Christine	McKenna, Jane	Thompson, Lisa M.
Fedeli, Victor	McNaughton, Monte	Walker, Bill
Hardeman, Ernie	Miller, Norm	Wilson, Jim
Harris, Michael	Milligan, Rob E.	Yakabuski, John
Hillier, Randy	Munro, Julia	Yurek, Jeff
Hudak, Tim	Nicholls, Rick	

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those opposed to the motion, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Albanese, Laura
 Armstrong, Teresa J.
 Balkissoon, Bas
 Bartolucci, Rick
 Berardinetti, Lorenzo
 Bisson, Gilles
 Bradley, James J.
 Broten, Laurel C.
 Cansfield, Donna H.
 Chan, Michael
 Colle, Mike
 Coteau, Michael
 Crack, Grant
 Damerla, Dipika
 Del Duca, Steven
 Delaney, Bob
 Dhillon, Vic

Flynn, Kevin Daniel
 Forster, Cindy
 Gerretsen, John
 Gélinas, France
 Horwath, Andrea
 Hoskins, Eric
 Jaczek, Helena
 Jeffrey, Linda
 Kwinter, Monte
 Leal, Jeff
 MacCharles, Tracy
 Mangat, Amrit
 Mantha, Michael
 Marchese, Rosario
 Matthews, Deborah
 Mauro, Bill
 McMeekin, Ted

Moridi, Reza
 Murray, Glen R.
 Naqvi, Yasir
 Natyshak, Taras
 Orazietti, David
 Piruzza, Teresa
 Prue, Michael
 Qaadri, Shafiq
 Sandals, Liz
 Schein, Jonah
 Sergio, Mario
 Singh, Jagmeet
 Sousa, Charles
 Tabuns, Peter
 Takhar, Harinder S.
 Taylor, Monique
 Vanthof, John

Dickson, Joe
 DiNovo, Cheri
 Duguid, Brad
 Fife, Catherine
 McNeely, Phil
 Meilleur, Madeleine
 Miller, Paul
 Milloy, John

Wong, Soo
 Wynne, Kathleen O.
 Zimmer, David

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller):
 The ayes are 35; the nays are 62.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I declare the motion lost.

Motion negatived.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There's no further business this evening. This House is adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 1803.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneur: Hon. / L'hon. David C. Onley, O.Ont.

Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Dave Levac

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Tonia Grannum, Trevor Day, Anne Stokes

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

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Cansfield, Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	
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Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa–Vanier	
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
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No. 6



Nº 6

ISSN 1180-2987

**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

Second Session, 40th Parliament

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**



Wednesday 27 February 2013

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Deuxième session, 40^e législature

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

**Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac**

**Clerk
Deborah Deller**

**Président
L'honorable Dave Levac**

**Greffière
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 27 February 2013

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 27 février 2013

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

THRONE SPEECH DEBATE

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 26, 2013, on the motion for an address in reply to the speech of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor at the opening of the session.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate? The Minister of Consumer Services.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Good morning. Thank you, Speaker.

It is a privilege to rise today and speak about the throne speech. Perhaps, if I may, Speaker, I'll start off with some of the highlights from the speech and then talk more specifically about that, and then I'd like to also discuss what the throne speech means in terms of my new portfolio as Minister of Consumer Services, and then hopefully tie all that back together.

In terms of the throne speech itself, we know that one of the key features of it is to eliminate the deficit by 2017-18. That was in the budget last year. As you know, Speaker, we are ahead of schedule to do that; our projections are looking very good. But that really is a cornerstone of the speech, because at end of the day we need to be able to make sure we protect the programs and services that Ontarians have come to expect and enjoy, and make sure that our citizens are supported and that they are receiving the services they need from our government. That is a very critical piece of the throne speech. It's very much an even-handed approach: balancing the budget, allowing all parties to work together, finding savings where we can, but not just finding savings for the sake of finding savings—not at the risk of not helping the most vulnerable people, not at the risk of not providing the services that Ontarians expect their government to provide.

We also talked in the throne speech about increased accountability in the Legislature. We've seen some of that with respect to what the Minister of Health has put forward with Ornge, for example. The accountability framework there is, in my view, a model for other areas of government. I think that is an important feature of our throne speech, because at the end of the day we're all

accountable to the public, not just individual ministers and their portfolios, but all MPPs of the Legislature. So I don't think there would be any disagreement that accountability is absolutely key.

Something I'm really excited about that was in the throne speech is a focus on employment opportunities for Ontario's youth—in partnership with education, labour and private sector partners—because at the end of the day youth are our future. I think we can all agree on that. We do have some challenges with respect to youth unemployment, so focusing on a youth employment strategy—a real one that addresses the unemployment rates of young people in Ontario and helps create opportunities and paths for youth of our future. That ties in, of course, to what we provide from an education point of view for young people—whether it's at high school or post-secondary.

I know my kids in grade 10 are picking out their courses for grade 11 right now, and in a good way, I think, there are expectations that the kids start thinking about what it is they want to do and creating that path, whether it's employment after high school, college, university, the trades, and starting to think about what that looks like. Having said that, we all know that we don't always end up doing what we think we're going to do after we come out of the school system, but I think it is very helpful, the emphasis on career assessments and the emphasis on career planning.

Another feature of the throne speech is ensuring municipalities and families have input on local energy infrastructure in their communities, so that we ensure that we have willing hosts when it comes to energy infrastructure. Because at the end of the day municipalities are, as we know, independently elected democratic bodies, and it is not the role of the province to interfere with those decisions. We are very happy that we're going to ensure that municipalities do have input on local energy infrastructure. I know that's really important in the Durham side of my riding of Pickering-Scarborough East, because it's very much an energy hub. We have the nuclear facilities; there's an emerging nuclear belt, if you will, for the GTA. Getting that right balance between nuclear and renewables is very important, and working closely with municipalities is what we're going to do going forward.

Next—and this isn't in any particular order—is ensuring a respectful partnership with labour leaders by building a sustainable process for wage negotiation through collective bargaining and interest arbitration. Already, just a mere matter of days after the throne speech, we're

seeing good progress there in a discussion with our education partners. We had fantastic news last Friday about extracurriculars at the high school level. This is incredibly promising. It's very important, not just to our government—in fact, more importantly, to the students of our education system. I think we set a new tone and a new pace with our bargaining partners, and I'm very, very hopeful that that positive approach will continue and that all parties involved in the process will be respected and that in turn will help us to continue to build the best education and health care system in the world.

Health care—I think it goes without saying that if you don't have your health, you don't have wealth, as they say. Our investments in health care are absolutely record-setting. They are well regarded, not just in Canada but around the world. It's very important that we continue to make the progress that we've made, whether it's reducing wait times, whether it is continuing to move with the health care agenda set out by the Minister of Health, which is focused, as you know, on providing the right health care at the right time in the right place. We have an aging population, and it is important that we understand the dynamics of that aging population. Within that aging population there is not a homogeneous group. We have young seniors; we have older seniors; we have seniors who may want to stay at home. So this whole concept of delivering health care in the community closer to home when it's needed is very important to seniors. For those seniors who cannot stay at home, we will, of course, continue to invest in long-term health care.

At the end of the day—we're doing a switch-up here with the Speakers—none of this can be achieved without working collaboratively with all the parties in the Legislature. We really are demonstrating that. The Premier has reached out to the opposition parties very early in the process, and there are good ideas. There are good ideas on all sides of the Legislature, and I'm hopeful that that positive tone that the Premier has set will continue and that we will work together, identifying good ideas from all parties, because at the end of the day it's in the best interests of our constituents that we do that.

0910

Just to share a quote with you from the throne speech, and what Premier Wynne talked about, she said, "Our government is committed to co-operating with opposition parties to move ... forward. We will focus on balancing the budget and ensuring opportunities for every Ontarian without letting anyone slip through the cracks. When we work together, Ontario is a place of endless possibilities." That was a quote from our new Premier.

I'll turn, if I may, to what the throne speech said about my ministry, the Ministry of Consumer Services—if I could give some highlights there and share that with the Legislature today.

You may recall, Speaker, in the throne speech, the Premier talked about strengthening the rights of Ontario consumers when it comes to door-to-door sales, debt settlement services, real estate transactions and mobile smart phone contracts.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: It's all important stuff.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: It's very important stuff, as my colleague is mentioning.

When I think about the Ministry of Consumer Services, it is two parts. One is protecting consumer confidence and building public safety, but it's also respecting businesses and carrying a bit of a flag for businesses, reducing regulatory burden. When we have that right balance and we increase consumer confidence, that directly ties to jobs and the economy in this province. So it's a pretty small but mighty ministry.

It's a regulatory ministry; it has a very small number of employees. That has shifted dramatically over the last 10 years, from over 1,000 employees to about 150. But when you look at the agencies, the delegated administrative authorities associated with the ministry, they have about 1,200 employees. When you look at all the registrants and licensees of those agencies, I believe that number is about a quarter of a million.

The impact is broad, and as I said, it's all focused on consumer protection, public safety and ensuring that businesses adhere to the law but also are not burdened by regulation. I think it's a pretty exciting ministry. Many of the initiatives that have come out of consumer services are relatively low-cost and have a huge and positive impact on Ontarians.

Getting back to the throne speech, I think when we talk about what's in there, those initiatives also are not necessarily huge investments by the province but really promote the principle of consumer confidence and—

Interjections.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Yes—investments that make a big difference, as my colleagues are saying.

In the throne speech, what the Premier talked about is, because our marketplace must be fair and the prices we pay for certain services must be transparent, those specific initiatives—door-to-door sales, debt settlement, real estate transactions and mobile smart phone contracts—are going to be addressed.

There are some other things we're looking at in the ministry that weren't specifically mentioned in the throne speech, but let me just touch on the specific ones. I should also say that these, as well as other initiatives of the Ministry of Consumer Services—we'll take very strong action to protect Ontario consumers, and that is part of our commitment to ensuring a fair, safe and informed marketplace.

Looking at door-to-door sales, I think when we talk about door-to-door sales, people think of water heaters in particular. I think we all have heard about—or maybe even experienced it ourselves—the aggressive door-to-door sales practices of some door-to-door sales for water heaters, and it's a widespread and growing concern for many Ontario homeowners. In fact, I believe it's the number one complaint that gets called into or emailed into the Ministry of Consumer Services. That's why it's on the top of my to-do list; it's to look at that.

Just to put it in a bit of context, the number of inquiries/concerns/complaints the ministry has received on

this topic has increased more than tenfold from 2008 to 2012. So it's a big concern, and it's at the top of our list in terms of making sure our marketplace is fair. We're going to consider strengthening consumer protection measures in this area, and I look forward to making announcements soon on this.

Debt settlement services is another topic we've heard about a lot here in the Legislature and in our ridings. We intend to regulate debt settlement companies to protect vulnerable consumers from exaggerated claims and any abusive practices in the marketplace. We want to ensure that all businesses in this sector obey the law. After consultation with stakeholders, which is already under way, we will move forward to look at banning debt settlement companies from charging upfront fees, limiting the amount of fees consumers are charged and, of course, requiring a clear and transparent contract for these services, as well as a cooling-off period. That's high up on our list in terms of consumer protection.

I know that real estate transactions have also been in the news. I've had some inquiries from the media as well, since becoming Minister of Consumer Services. We're looking at ways we can do two things. One is to reduce the cost for consumers and provide them with more choices when they want to buy or sell a home. But we also want to look at ways we can reduce the regulatory burden for the real estate industry. This is a prime example, Speaker, where we need to balance the interests of consumers in Ontario but not put businesses out of business, not overly burden industries such as the real estate one with regulations. We want to make sure that they're necessary, that they're appropriate, that they're clear and that they're understood.

Another one I mentioned is mobile and smart phone contracts. I think we'll remember Bill 82, the Wireless Services Agreements Act that was introduced by a colleague of mine in the Legislature last session. We are looking at that very aggressively right now. Also, Speaker, the CRTC has come along too, and they're proceeding with consultation. So we need to determine how we can align ourselves with what the CRTC is doing: Is their code that comes out of that process going to be strong enough, or is our bill going to be strong enough? The good thing is that I think our bill has continued to strengthen. So we'll be determining fairly quickly what future action might be needed to protect consumers on this whole file of mobile and smart phone contracts.

For me too, Speaker—as I mentioned before, I have two teenagers, twins, and they have cellphones, and I have to confess that I'm not entirely clear what we signed up for when we got them their cellphones. I think many Ontarians feel that way too, and when you go to make a change in your contract or your phone or whatever, then you realize what the fine print actually said. The bottom line is that we need to make sure these kinds of contracts are fair and transparent. At the same time, there's no intent to overly burden the industry or put the industry out of business; that's not the intent here at all. So I'm looking forward to moving this file forward in my new role as Minister of Consumer Services.

Just to mention, too, some related initiatives—they weren't specifically mentioned in the throne speech, but they do fall under our commitment to a fair and transparent marketplace. The review of the Condominium Act: As many people here know, we're continuing with a very collaborative and public engagement process. My colleague MPP Albanese from York South-Weston actually held a second-round consultation in her riding just this week. I went to that, and it was just fantastic. She had people from all perspectives. She had owners, she had property managers, she had condo board members and it was a really good session. I know that another colleague of mine is having another session tomorrow night.

The reason this review of the act is happening is because the condominium market has changed dramatically since it came into force 11 years ago. As I mentioned in the House the other day, condos now account for half of all new houses built in the province, and over one million Ontarians call a condominium home. So it's very important that we look at that, going forward.

0920

We're also going to look at what parts of the consultation findings we can act on sooner rather than later. We want to make sure it's a thorough consultation. We have an expert panel, we have a residents' panel and there will be a further public review before this comes back to government. We'll look at what part of it we can move forward on based on the feedback from all stakeholders.

Home inspection is another popular issue out there, because at the end of the day, in the current state, anyone can call themselves a home inspector. We're working with home inspector associations, consumers, representatives—

Hon. Ted McMeekin: It's Bartolucci's next career.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Pardon? Whose next career?

Interjection: Rick—

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Okay, it might be someone's next career here in the Legislature, so maybe we'll get him involved in the stakeholder consultations.

Like other consumer protection initiatives, Speaker, our intent is to increase transparency of this profession and ensure, perhaps, a minimum standard of training and consistency in home inspections, and at the end of the day, enhancing consumer protection.

Last but not least, we're going to continue to focus on a fair marketplace and transparent prices. Consumer laws prohibit false, misleading or deceptive representation—such as ads, contracts or sales pitches. In sectors like motor vehicles and travel and credit, the law actually goes further. It regulates how advertising discloses all costs to ensure prices are transparent. We call that all-in pricing, Speaker. We will review these measures to see if they're providing the right level of pricing transparency and fairness in the marketplace.

In conclusion, Speaker, I look forward to supporting these measures in the throne speech as the Minister of Consumer Services. I look forward to hearing more feed-

back from all of my colleagues across the Legislature and the public as we go forward. Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to speak this morning.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments? The member from Huron-Bruce.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to acknowledge the comments that we heard earlier with regard to the throne speech. The Minister of Consumer Services actually quoted the Premier as saying that Ontario is a place of opportunities. This is where there's a divide in the road, Mr. Speaker, because unfortunately, with regard to the riding that I represent, Huron-Bruce in rural Ontario, people really can't agree to that any longer.

When you examine the throne speech further, my goodness, when it comes to the second-largest sector in this province, there was not a lot of mention in the throne speech in terms of how we can prop up rural Ontario, give them their voices back and, for goodness' sake, drive our sector forward in terms of the agri-food sector. Agriculture was mentioned once; rural was mentioned three times. Food was only mentioned once, which is rather ironic because we know it was forgotten about last week until it was drawn to their attention. But let that alone.

A place of opportunity means that Ontario needs to be a forum whereby voices can be heard. And really and truly, this Liberal government continues to strip away authority from municipalities. This Liberal government continues to turn a deaf ear to the issues that really matter. If Ontario was a place of opportunities, they would let municipalities have a voice and give them an opportunity to represent their constituents in their municipalities and define whether indeed they want to be a willing host community for development, such as industrial wind turbines. If Ontario was a place of opportunity, they would listen to experts that are coming forward, citing the fact that this Liberal government in no way can identify or prove that there are no associations to negative health impacts by industrial wind turbines.

This throne speech does not go far enough and we cannot support it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments? The member from Hamilton Mountain.

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to congratulate the Minister of Consumer Services for her appointment to cabinet. Congratulations on that. I know that you will do your best in that portfolio.

I was listening to your speech from the throne, and there were a lot of buzzwords in there: "working together," "making sure we're not letting people fall through the cracks." The NDP is prepared to support the throne speech. But we really—

Interjections.

Miss Monique Taylor: But—but, but, but. Listen for the "buts." But there needs to be action. There need to be results when it comes to the budget. The budget is not going to be the same story as the throne speech with buzzwords and love-ins and—

Interjection: Kumbaya.

Miss Monique Taylor: Kumbaya. "Kumbaya" is a good word that I've used often.

This is something that we're serious about, and the Liberal government has to understand that the budget needs to prove results.

I was listening when you were speaking about the condos. I know that our member from Trinity-Spadina has put a lot of work into condos. I hope that you're planning on working with our members, working together, to create good results on behalf of the people of this province.

You know, there are priorities that we're looking for in the budget: home care, putting young people to work. These are things that were very vaguely touched on throughout the throne speech, and we're continuing to look for that dialogue to see specifics on how you're going to be pushing those priorities for us on our behalf and making sure that you truly are working with this side of the House. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments? The Attorney General.

Hon. John Gerretsen: Thank you very much, Speaker. Let me first of all congratulate the Minister of Consumer Services for the initiatives that she is bringing forth with respect to consumer protection initiatives. Whether it relates to cellphones, hot water heaters, gym memberships—these are all good initiatives from which the people of Ontario will benefit as a whole.

Let me just address a couple of issues. You know, the thing that I was really taken with as far as the throne speech was concerned was the mention of a fair society. That's really what government should be all about: creating opportunities for everyone. Now, you know, by—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Member from Huron-Bruce.

Hon. John Gerretsen: I find it very interesting that the Tory members would laugh about trying to create a fair society; a fair society in which everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed. That surely is what government—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Okay, folks, we're a little feisty this morning. The Attorney General knows what buttons to push, and you're biting. I would suggest we cut it back a bit, please, because I cannot hear him. Thank you.

Hon. John Gerretsen: Thank you very much, Speaker. I cannot imagine why anybody would laugh at trying to create a fair society. That's what we should be all about in government, whether it's at this level, the federal level or the local level of government: to create as much opportunity as possible for our young people and to make sure that the most vulnerable in our society are looked after in the best way possible. That's why I look forward to the implementation of the Manure-Rankin—Lankin report.

Interjection: Manure?

Hon. John Gerretsen: Munir-Lankin report. Speaker, it's very early in the morning.

We need to make sure that the people, particularly at the bottom end of the economic scale, are given the best opportunities to succeed in life so that they can enjoy the same kind of lifestyle that many of us in this province have been able to reach.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you very much. Questions and comments?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: You haven't seen the light, John; that's your trouble.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you to the member from Oxford. The member from Northumberland–Quinte West.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to address the speech from the throne. As my esteemed colleague across the way from Kingston mentioned, there is a whole boatload of manure here.

I listened with intent to the Minister of Consumer Services talk—and rightfully so—about local input from municipalities and how this new Liberal government is going to actually listen to elected officials in a democracy, which is what we have. Mr. Speaker, this is lip service; we've seen this before. This is the same old song that we saw under Mr. McGuinty: how they respect and they want to listen and create some dialogue and reach out to the municipalities. But the fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, this government has ignored—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Okay, folks, it's getting a little out of hand, yelling across the floor. I can't hear the member speaking. The next person that has a little outburst might be taking a walk.

Continue.

0930

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I will be talking about this a little later on, but I'm a little disheartened by what I'm hearing from across the floor. They talk about wanting to work together and co-operating together and moving forward. Again, this is the same old song that we hear repeatedly, over and over again. As a former educator—this is how we learn: through repetition. But the people of Ontario obviously haven't learned their lessons by listening to this government over and over again. We need a change, and we're putting forward some bold ideas that are going to bring positive change to the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The minister has two minutes to respond.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Thank you very much, Speaker. I want to acknowledge the participation of the members opposite from Hamilton Mountain, Northumberland–Quinte West and of course the Attorney General as well, for their comments on the throne speech this morning.

There was some suggestion that the throne speech had high-level words, commitments that were not necessarily very specific or even believable. I just want to assure the

other parties that that is not the case. There is a genuine commitment here to work with all parties. I know for me, as the Minister of Consumer Services, the first thing I did was I called all four of my critics—four critics—and I was very pleased to have a discussion—

Hon. Ted McMeekin: You've got four critics?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Yes, I have four critics. I have a red tape critic, a consumer services critic on the PC side; and also two members from the NDP, one for consumer services—and someone mentioned the member from Trinity–Spadina on condos, my fourth critic. I was very happy to talk to him about what he has done so far, related to condo review. I have arranged a technical briefing for all four critics, and I am very happy with our start in working together on this file. So I'm confident, I'm hopeful, that we can work together.

This is a minority government. The people of Ontario expect us to work together. The Ontario population has sent us here to work together, and I'm confident we can work collaboratively. We won't always agree, of course, but at the end of the day I think everyone will put forward what we believe is best for Ontarians. We have to do it within the fiscal framework I discussed earlier, and we'll provide the programs and services Ontarians will continue to enjoy. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: When I listened to the minister—and I'd like to congratulate her on her new post, by the way, Mr. Speaker. It's always nice to see a fresh face in the ministry. But again, it's a lot of the same old same old.

When the new Premier was selected by the Liberal Party—she wasn't elected by the people of Ontario, I would like to say—there was some hope. We were actually hoping that this new Premier would be sincere in working with us. But so far, we're only one week and a couple of days into the new session, and we're getting a lot of the same old same old: "We're reaching out to the opposition; we want to work with the opposition." But the fact of the matter is that is not the case.

Again, they say, "We want to step back and we want to consult with local municipalities and give local municipalities a stronger voice," but that is not happening. If the new Premier was sincere in what she's saying about working together and getting municipalities the rightful dignity that they have as elected officials in a democracy, she would put a moratorium on wind turbines today, Mr. Speaker—today.

We also heard from the Minister of Consumer Services, talking about the Green Energy Act and how that is a key to moving forward together for the province of Ontario. Mr. Speaker, this is the Auditor General, not myself, saying this. When this Liberal government came to power almost a decade ago, 25% of our electricity was produced by hydro, water power, in the province of Ontario. Today, after these intrusive industrial-sized wind turbines have been thrust upon us—unwillingly—only 22% of green energy in hydro is produced in the

province, and 3% is made up of wind and solar, so 25% is renewable green energy. We're at the same stage we were at a decade ago. We're spilling water over the falls at Niagara Falls and we're venting steam at nuclear power facilities because these industrial wind turbines are not producing energy when it's required. I just want to say that that was definitely a flawed policy, and if this new Premier wanted to actually listen, she would bring in a moratorium today.

We also heard the Minister of Consumer Services talk about extracurriculars. Well, Mr. Speaker, the backroom deals made by the new Premier with the federations and the union bosses haven't been disclosed. We don't know what deals have been made; we're not sure as to what the secret deals entail. What's going to happen when those details do come out? There's a two-year wage freeze, but when you have the president of OSSTF, Mr. Ken Coran, come out and say, "We're very pleased with the progress we're making," it makes one wonder. It makes one really sit there and wonder what kind of deal has been struck, whether or not this Liberal government—should they actually be in power a couple of years from now—will give the teachers an 8%, 10%, 12%, or 15% pay increase.

Mr. Speaker, transparency is what the people of this province asked for. This is what they want. They want us to work together. I agree, but we're not getting any of that. We're getting lip service from this government. It's the same old song, and people are really getting tired of it.

We heard about this government focusing on education and how it's a priority. Well, I am here today as a former high school teacher because these policies that the Liberals have brought in over the last decade have made a mockery of the education system in the province of Ontario.

They also said they're not going to make any cuts to education or health care. It was enlightening to us yesterday to hear that the Toronto District School Board will be actually firing hundreds of teachers and support staff because they have to make up for the \$55-million shortfall in their budget. The Liberals are firing teachers and support staff, and these are the individuals who do a great job day to day. I know, Mr. Speaker; I was on the front lines. These are people who actually care about the state of education in the province of Ontario. They don't have a political agenda. They get up in the morning, and they go and do their job to make sure that the young people of this province are going to have opportunities in the 21st century. We're not seeing that.

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We also hear this government repeatedly say it's either horses or health care. Right? So here's the double down, if you will, when it comes to the gambling on that scenario: We have the horse industry with 60,000 people whose livelihoods at stake, who are going to lose their jobs, because this government has ignored, again, the voices of people in Ontario. These are individuals who aren't asking for handouts. These are hard-working Ontarians who pay their taxes. They contribute to the coffers

of this province that support health care. Over a billion dollars last year was made by the horse racing industry that went into health care, went into education. I know the member from Niagara Falls would agree that this is important.

However, we're seeing cuts. Quinte Health Care is facing a crisis when it comes to the care that is given at the hospitals in Trenton—Trenton Memorial—Belleville and Picton. Some \$10 million has been slashed from their budget this year, yet we don't hear about this.

The Liberals are saying, "We care about health care. It's either horses or health care." Well, they've doubled down. They've killed the horse racing industry in this province, and they're killing the health care system that we can deliver.

They talk a good game. They're all about, "Oh, we're doing marvellous things in health care and education." I've given you examples where they're failing on education. They're failing on providing world-class health care, and they're failing the people of the province of Ontario.

We talk about the budget in the throne speech. The Minister of Consumer Services mentioned that they are serious about addressing overspending and taking austerity measures to make sure that the province gets back on track. Again, this is the same old song going round and round.

The first thing that the new Premier did when she was voted in by the Liberal Party to be the new Premier was to increase the size of cabinet by 22%. Now, what does that mean? People at home, watching on their televisions, are thinking, "Well, what does that mean?" It's not significant; it's not tangible. But here's what it means: It means an increase of \$3 million annually in salaries that go to friends who supported the new Premier—\$3 million. It doesn't sound like a lot of money, but I'm sure \$3 million could be spent better elsewhere. I'm throwing it out here: perhaps health care, or putting more EAs in the classrooms to ensure that children with special needs get the proper education that they're going to require.

We heard the minister talk about red tape, and how the Liberal Party is going to cut red tape to ensure that small businesses in the province of Ontario are going to be successful. The only red tape I've ever seen this party cut is at photo ops. If the minister and the Premier are serious about getting down to work and creating new jobs when it comes to small business, and reducing red tape, I would encourage the government to actually listen to the people.

When I'm in my riding—and I've had a lot of time in my riding in the last several months, since this government's prorogued government. I went around to the small businesses. I put out a small business survey, to get some feedback. What are the challenges that they're facing? You know what the number one thing was? The number one thing was red tape. The amount of time that the businesses spend in filling out forms and complying with regulations that this government has brought in takes away from their profit. We definitely heard that, through

the agricultural survey that my esteemed colleague from Oxford brought out. Mr. Speaker, four months is what the average farmer spends filling out forms—that would be four weeks. Sorry. Four weeks filling out forms—so one month out of a 12-month year; right?

Interjection.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Yes. Four months every four years; right? One month out of the calendar year is what farmers have to fill out annually. That takes away from their productivity.

What I'm also hearing from the survey that the member from Oxford put out is that this takes away time from their families, time from their businesses, but also, more importantly, sometimes the forms are so complex that they actually have to hire other individuals to fill out the forms. It's unacceptable.

Red tape should be a priority, and Tim Hudak and the PC Party have made it very clear this would be a priority for our party, should we come to power. Mr. Speaker, we do care about small businesses. We do care about agriculture in the province of Ontario. We do care about listening to elected officials at the municipal level.

We heard the minister also talk about “top of the list.” What is not at the top of the list with this party? We hear them talk over and over again—again, lip service. What's the top priority? Well, the new Premier has said agriculture is a priority. That's why she took on that portfolio. But not food—

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Not food.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Yes.

Yesterday, the minister, when questioned by the member from Oxford, our esteemed critic for food and rural affairs and agriculture—he has been asking for months to sit down and discuss the issues of agriculture and food and rural affairs. And what was the response we got from the new Premier? “I'm sorry. I'm sorry I haven't had time to sit down with you.”

Mr. Speaker, agriculture is the second-largest sector in producing revenue for this province, and we have a new Premier who doesn't have time to address the issues that we have in rural Ontario. It's unacceptable. “We don't have time.” Who says that? If it's truly a priority, give the portfolio to a competent individual who actually cares about rural Ontario.

We heard the minister, again, talk about fine print. Mr. Speaker, this is the fine print government. If I was to sign any kind of deal with the Liberals, either under Mr. McGuinty or the new Premier, Ms. Wynne—same old same old—I would definitely make sure that I would have my lawyers go over the fine print with a microscope, because this government cannot be trusted. The new Premier is not new at all. She was at the table for the gas plant scandals. She was at the table for Ornge. She was at the table for eHealth. It's the same old song. Fine print is absolutely correct—when it comes to fine print, I would caution any individual or political party to make sure that if you're entering a deal with this same old Liberal government, make sure you read the fine print.

Interjection: Same old.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Same old.

They talk about thorough consultation with stakeholders. Again, Mr. Speaker, I'm repeating myself because this is how we learn, but it's the same old song over there, right? They talk a good talk. I have to give credit where credit's due. The Liberal Party is extremely good at spinning the issues. They are very good at making sure that the general public doesn't actually get the facts. 0950

So when they say they want to consult—thorough consultation, as the minister pointed out—the fact of the matter is they turn a deaf ear to elected officials at the municipal level. We've seen this, again, with the wind turbines that are cropping up throughout the province of Ontario—in rural Ontario—with no consultation. They're denying the rights of elected officials. What does that say about this party and their views on democracy? Mr. Speaker, it's disheartening.

Again, as my esteemed colleague from Huron-Bruce pointed out, agriculture was only mentioned once in the throne speech. Now this Premier, Ms. Wynne, who has taken on the portfolio of agriculture and food—

Interjection: And food.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: And food—if she's truly committed to working with rural Ontario and the agricultural sector, you would think it would be a priority. You know what the priority is here, Mr. Speaker? The priority is trying to rebrand the Liberal Party as an actual party that can govern.

How many times in the throne speech was “new government” mentioned? Sixteen times, I believe, Mr. Speaker.

Interjection: More than that.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: More than that. The member from Cambridge obviously, as a professor, has an astute account of how many times things were mentioned in the throne speech. But here's the fact: If the new Liberal government was interested, they would have mentioned agriculture more than once. So I'm a little disheartened, Mr. Speaker.

When it comes to the Liberal Party trying to spin and fool the people of Ontario once again, well, I'm here to say today it's not going to happen. It just cannot happen. It's time for a change. Ontario needs change. Tim Hudak and the PC Party are going to bring that change. We put forward white papers and bold ideas that are going to get this province back on track. We're going to provide the best health care, the best education system the world has. I'm proud to say that I sit over here today with my colleagues, and that's what we're going to do because Progressive Conservatives are good on their word.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jonah Schein: Thank you, Speaker. It's nice to see you in the chair and it's nice to be back here in the Legislature four months later. Welcome back, everyone, and congratulations to the new Premier and to all the new cabinet ministers. I'm looking forward to getting things

going here again in the province of Ontario; it's been too long.

I think we can try to put a good spin on things, but as my colleague from Northumberland–Quinte West was saying, people will not forget. You can't fool people all the time. So when we hear members from the same old government come here and talk about respect for workers, I can assure you that workers in this province have not forgotten this government's record when it comes to negotiating fairly, and that the parents in my community have not forgotten because their kids still do not have extracurriculars in their schools, and that's a result of very poor decision-making by this government. Nevertheless, we want to give them a chance to try to turn things around.

In response to the throne speech, I heard a lot of good things in there—a lot of talk, a lot of talk about talk, a lot of talk about conversations. Frankly, Speaker, when I talk to people and listen to people in my riding, people are desperate for action. They're desperate to see results come out of this Legislature. I think that we've been fairly clear—Andrea Horwath and the NDP have been quite clear—that we'll support the throne speech. It puts out some good concepts, but we actually need to see some concrete things in the budget. We've put forward some good ideas, things that matter to people across this province to make life easier, to make life more affordable. We want to see this government take these ideas seriously.

We want to see more affordable auto insurance in this province. People cannot pay their bills. The Premier may have forgotten to put "food" in the title of her ministry, but we've also seen that food has been totally forgotten by this government in terms of making sure that people can put food on the table. We need to make sure that we see those results in the budget.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to join the debate this morning and respond to the comments from the member from Northumberland–Quinte West. When you contrast those to the comments we've just heard from the member from Davenport, you see two different approaches. One, I think, is a healthy approach; one is a positive approach; one is the approach that the people of Ontario would like us to bring to the table. The member from Davenport—if I could summarize his comments, what I took out of them is, "We don't agree on everything. We think you can probably do better on some things, but we're prepared to try to work with you as a government."

When I listened to the first speaker, the speaker from Northumberland–Quinte West, I got this: "The sky is falling. Everything is wrong. The school system is in chaos. Health care is in chaos. I did a survey"—which I'd love to see. I think you should share that survey, certainly with the minister. Bring the survey into the House. We'd all love to have a look at it. That's what people in Ontario

are expecting us to do. If you've got information from your constituents, bring it into the House—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The members are all aware that we go through the Chair. We don't have cross-dialogue and arguments between each other.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I will determine that. You come through the Chair.

And you: Don't respond directly across to the member. You know the rules. Thank you.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you, Speaker.

To get back to what I was trying to say: The approach we bring to this House is equally as important as the substance of the throne speech. I think the throne speech reached out to the other two parties. People in Ontario would like us to work on a number of priorities: jobs; the economy; making sure that everybody in the province of Ontario gets treated in an equitable way. Can we work together as three parties to ensure that happens? It appears, from the comments I've heard, that one party is showing a willingness to do that. The other—it's just the same old same old.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's a pleasure to rise in the House, and it's good to be back. Again, I would like to extend my congratulations to the new ministers and the increase of government by 22%.

Having listened to the speech from the throne, personally I found it somewhat condescending. I also found it to be full of a lot of different platitudes. Premier Wynne's statement initially was encouraging to me, when I heard "a new way forward." However, it's still more of the same.

Let's look at the stats. Right now, there are over 600,000 Ontarians out of work. The government will say that they've also created 300,000 jobs, public service jobs. Let's talk about ability to pay. Who pays for those public service jobs? Well, the taxpayers do.

Let's talk about debt for a moment. The debt, when this government came into being, was about \$125 billion, back in 2003. Unfortunately, on the backs of taxpayers that debt has just skyrocketed 220% over the last 10 years, somewhere in the neighbourhood—that could be escalating anywhere from \$275 billion to upwards of \$311 billion; a huge increase in the debt, and on the backs of taxpayers.

We talked about agriculture. Agriculture is huge in my area, and of course there's very little mentioned about that. But one thing I would like to make mention of: There was talk about downloading, allowing municipalities to have greater say. You know what? We, as a caucus, put forward motions on this floor, asking the government to put moratoriums on wind turbines, asking the government to give municipalities a say in whether they want turbines or not. My area now has over 300 turbines. In my opinion, it's too little, too late. We need a new change, and the PCs will provide that change.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Mantha: I too want to extend congratulations to the new Premier and the ministers in their new roles. It's nice to see the new faces. It will be also enjoyable to start building some bridges so that I myself can start helping my constituents who are in desperate need in Algoma-Manitoulin.

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I enjoyed the throne speech. I have to say I enjoyed it because it touched on a lot of everything, but the specifics are not there. That's definitely something that I'm going to be focusing on—seeing how that throne speech is going to materialize into the actual budget that is going to be coming—because that's the important part. It's what's going to come out of that throne speech, and how that is going to assist the people of Algoma-Manitoulin and also the people of Ontario.

I enjoy listening to the debate on the throne speech, and that's one thing. I've listened to the government and I've listened to the Conservative Party, but when we do that, you listen, you kind of gauge yourself as far as what people are thinking and where the government is going to be coming with certain policies and the reaction that the Conservative Party has towards this. I choose to say that we can do something right now. I don't want to say that not until we come into power will we be able to do something. I choose to believe that we will do something where we can do something efficiently right now for all of our communities, and we need to get those results right away, not when we come into power. We need to get it done now because that's what Ontarians are expecting of us. We need to roll up our sleeves, we need to get focused as far as what we need to do, and we need to get this accomplished.

I like the nice words of having a genuine commitment, and I like hearing what my counterparts are saying as well. But until we actually get focused on what we need to accomplish here, we need to make sure that we look at everything that's going to be here. It is only responsible for us as the NDP to look at this budget, but we will hold you to the fire on it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Northumberland–Quinte West has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Again, I want to thank the members from Oakville and Davenport and also my esteemed colleague Mr. Nicholls, from Chatham-Kent–Essex.

What I'm hearing—and I like to listen because the fact of the matter is, you have to step back and listen to what is actually being said, but more important is what is actually being done. This government, unfortunately, has not learned their lesson. They're not listening or doing, and that's rather unfortunate.

I know my esteemed colleagues here in the third party, the NDP, have good intent in wanting to work with the Liberal Party. They're always optimistic that the Liberal Party is going to do something they can support, maybe

the budget, but unfortunately, the fact of the matter is, the governing party and the same old Premier that we've had for the last decade are not going to change. They're not going to change. They're not going to listen to the people of this province. They're not going to actually do anything substantive that is going to improve the lives of 600,000 individuals who woke up this morning without a job. They're not going to do anything that is going to improve the spending that this government spends. So, unfortunately, we can't trust this Liberal government—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you very much. Further debate?

Ms. Sarah Campbell: It is a pleasure to stand up and speak in response to the speech from the throne. I am grateful to have this opportunity to speak to it and to raise a northern perspective.

As I told my constituents, my initial reaction was surprise and then disappointment. Surprise because, as it appears, this government has been listening; at least they've been doing that much. They touched on a number of issues that are important to northerners and to people across the province. But then disappointment because when you listened closely to the speech from the throne, you noticed that yes, they had mentioned broad issues, just broad strokes of some of the key priorities, but there was a failure to commit, and that's what's really frustrating. So, really, when you scrutinized it, it was a hollow speech and one that didn't provide much in the way of solutions to our problems.

It did touch on a number of issues, as I said. It committed to having an aboriginal focus: sharing in resources, closing the gap with First Nations, Métis and Inuit children; and a commitment to energy conservation. It also touched on home care, which is very big in the northwest; youth employment; hydro prices, also something very big in the northwest; auto insurance rates; and economic development. But again, that's all it did: touch on these issues.

When it comes to a vision, a plan or even a direction, we're left looking for answers in the Premier's chair, and really, what we've been left with is basically the sound of crickets just chirping in the distance. There's no plan. There's no vision. That's what's truly disappointing.

So other than it being a desperate attempt to rebrand the same old Liberal government as a new one, we're left with hollow phrases. Here are some quotes that I pulled in terms of any kind of commitment in the throne speech: understanding and expanding "access to home care"—very vague concepts; "protecting individuals against fraud and working to reduce" auto "insurance rates"; working "to evaluate corporate tax compliance"; and to work with partners to help young people "find placements, internships and co-op programs." It's not exactly the strong language that we're looking for; again, no real commitment to any of these really important concepts.

Really what it did was it just made a mockery. That's what I felt like; I felt like I was kind of mocked. I think people in the northwest felt they were mocked. Again, there's a recognition that these are some of the issues, but

it seemed as though the government wasn't really committed to making any changes.

Mr. Jonah Schein: Lip service.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: Lip service; exactly. I was kind of left with the impression that the government knows what the problems are, but they almost seem to hope that we go to the polls quickly enough, before the electorate figures out that they don't really have a plan.

Another analogy I was thinking about is, essentially this government is banking on the new-car smell, on making the odour of the last eight or 10 years of neglect kind of go away and hoping that with a new mandate we won't suffer from buyer's remorse. But that's just not acceptable.

I wanted to start off by talking a little bit about northwestern Ontario and how this throne speech really affects our area. Truth be told, there's not a lot in this throne speech that really offers very much for those of us living in the northwest. There's not a lot in this speech that offers much for anyone in Ontario, but for those of us in the north who are used to fighting for table scraps from the province of Ontario, there's literally nothing. Other than suggesting that northern and rural voices will be heard, the north is only mentioned twice, and both times it was only mentioned in passing—

Interjection: That's more than agriculture.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: Yes, that's true. And both times, it was lumped in with just about every other area of this province.

To be honest, we had higher expectations, especially because while the new Premier was campaigning, there was a lot of talk about northern Ontario, about understanding our issues and really raising expectations that there would be some movement. This Premier does claim to be, as I said, in tune with northern voices, but she also claims to be in tune with rural voices, southern voices, urban voices. Let's just put it this way: If you have a voice, the Premier claims to be in tune with it. To me, that's suggesting that the government continues to feel that a one-size-fits-all policy really does fit all, and that's simply not the case. There are many different regions in Ontario today, and unfortunately, we're not all being treated equally. This is a real problem, especially in the northwest.

You can't run a government based on a "we can win without ..." approach and cater only to narrow interests that have enough power to re-elect you time and time again. That's really the government that we've had for the last eight years, and it simply hasn't worked. Good government looks beyond those narrow interests and governs for the whole province. It shows leadership, and it goes in a direction that suits all of those whom it serves. But we haven't had that type of leadership in Ontario for decades, and it's literally tearing this province apart.

The first step is to give those who are feeling disenfranchised a voice, to look at the system and to see the source of the problems. If we do that in Ontario, we see that the problem really is the electoral system: the idea of

representation by population with no attempt to compensate for regional cleavages or difference. It's very unjust to have one riding that can be, for instance, more than 350,000 square kilometres, with more than 70 municipal councils and First Nations, where another riding can be only a few city blocks or a small portion of one municipality.

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In the throne speech, the government does say that they will work to eliminate issues like the gas plant cancellation by doing more advance consultation, which is a nice idea, but the better way to ensure that hundreds of millions of dollars aren't wasted on narrow partisan interests is to create a system where the government cannot be so focused on one small area of the province. Five ridings: That really could be the balance of power.

We have a system that encourages catering to narrow regional interests. Oftentimes, that leads to one part of the province imposing its will on another part—areas where they don't live, areas where they don't work, areas where they probably will never visit—because they have louder voices, because they have better resources and because the electoral system discriminates based on population. This isn't just the case for northwestern Ontario; it's the case for northeastern Ontario, central Ontario, rural Ontario—we're all trapped in a relationship with Toronto, Mississauga and the rest of the GTA, in the northwest, and most of us would like out of this relationship. We'd like autonomy, but we don't have the clout or the power to be in control of our own destiny.

By contrast, in my region what most of us would really like to do is join Manitoba. If we were to do that, we could expect to have five or seven ridings that would have a significant amount of influence on the legislative agenda. We would also have a province that would represent our needs more closely. Of course, that's contrasting to what we have now, which is one riding. What happens is, when we only have, basically, one riding to represent the diverse issues and concerns that we have, we have bills like the Far North Act and the Species at Risk Act, where there are some narrow interests that are influencing the agenda. We need some balance.

If you break it down even further, there are rural areas that find themselves lumped in with large urban ridings and they're just not given the population. We see that also in the north, where there are communities like Attikokan, Red Rock, Nipigon and Terrace Bay, and they're lumped in with larger centres like Thunder Bay, so there are even some of those challenges. What I'm saying, just to be clear, is that what we need to do is if we can't make changes to the electoral system, what we can do is make changes to the Legislature.

One of the best things that we could do is to create a northern committee, where we could have those voices that are brought forward and we could have legislation that impacts certain areas. We could start with the north; we could maybe have other committees that represent other areas of the province and they could, as my colleague says, kind of do a road test: see how the proposed

legislation would affect these areas of the province. That's something that would be inexpensive, it's something that we could do to achieve some immediate solutions and it's one that I strongly would encourage the Premier to go ahead with. It's just not acceptable for the Premier to decide to, instead of doing something that would represent the democratic will of northern Ontario, set up a very exclusive committee made up of only a couple of people belonging to one particular political party. That goes completely against the spirit of the northern committee, which would have representatives from all political stripes who would be involved.

I'm not sure if we're still going one more minute. One more minute? Okay.

Again, we have an opportunity for change. The Premier has done a lot to raise the expectations of people in northern Ontario, but there hasn't been very much that's been delivered. Really, after all of the conversations and the relationships—there's been a lot of talk of these two concepts, and after all these conversations that the Premier has had with northern Ontario, we had really hoped that we would see some of our priorities make their way into some of the government's priorities, and we really haven't seen that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I'd like to thank the member from Kenora–Rainy River, and I'll remind her that she has the floor when the debate resumes.

Debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): This being the time, this House stands recessed until 10:30 this morning.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: I'm delighted to welcome to the Legislature today Mrs. Natalie Giordano and page Alexander's sister—that's his mum—Anjelica Giordano, to enjoy an opportunity to hear what's going to happen in question period today. Thank you very much for joining us.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I'd like to introduce Susan Violin, who is the mother of Charlie Violin. Congratulations on Charlie's appointment and welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Jonah Schein: I'd like to welcome two political science students from the University of Toronto. Colin Campbell is visiting here today by way of Don Valley East and Amani Rauff is here by way of Mississauga-Streetsville. Welcome to the Legislature.

Hon. Teresa Piruzza: Good morning, I'm always pleased to introduce people who come and visit from the Windsor-Essex region. Today we have Tom Touralias, who is the director of engineering and infrastructure with the town of Lakeshore, who, of course, has been here in the last couple of days for the ROMA/OGRA conference, so some of you may have met with him in the last couple of days. Tom, welcome.

Mr. Mike Colle: It's my pleasure to introduce the family of Daniel Forestell, from Blessed Sacrament Catholic School in my riding of Eglinton–Lawrence. His family is visiting from north Toronto to see their son in action; Lisa Shrenk-Forestell, Paul Forestell and Daniel's brother Matthew and sister Sarah are all visiting the Legislature from north Toronto. Welcome.

Hon. David Zimmer: I want to acknowledge one of the Legislature's new pages, Stephanie Tom, who is from my riding of Willowdale, and to welcome her family, who have braved the weather to visit us here at the Legislature. Stephanie's parents, Christopher and Julie Tom, are here in the members' gallery. Joining them are Evelyn Tom, Stephanie Chen-Wong, and Stephanie's grandparents George and Susan Wong, both respected elders in the Wong Family Association.

Hon. John Milloy: I know members will want to join me in welcoming former page Mary Stuart and her mother, Christine Purdon, who are visiting from the great riding of Kitchener Centre today.

Hon. Liz Sandals: About to join us—I don't think they're here quite yet—are four representatives from the Ontario Student Trustees' Association with us this morning. They're Jacob Pullia, Noah Parker, Hirad Zafari and Kourosh Houshmand.

ORAL QUESTIONS

TEACHERS' COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question is to the Premier. Premier, I want to call your attention to a memo that Ken Coran, the head of the OSSTF, sent out to his membership on February 24, particularly page 4. Mr. Coran indicates that you have a central table that is going to work to utilize the Ontario Labour Relations Act process "that allows mid-term amendments to collective agreements."

Can you please tell us what Mr. Coran means by utilizing "mid-term amendments to collective agreements"?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: First of all, I want to commend the student trustees who came in to meet with me and the Minister of Education this morning to talk about the extracurriculars that are coming back in their schools and the schools that they're hearing from and students. I made it very clear that when I was privileged to begin to be the Premier that I would be reaching out to the leadership, that I would be asking them to come in to talk to us about how we could move forward, how we can put in place a better process going forward and make sure that our students have the supports that they need in their schools.

The fact that OSSTF has been willing to engage with us, that they're going to have an ongoing conversation with us, the fact that they understand that there is no more money to put into the system at this point is a very positive step forward.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I think, Speaker, it should give us pause that the Premier didn't even attempt to answer my very direct and simple question. I'm concerned that it goes beyond simply reaching out. I'm worried that the Premier is handing over the keys to the education system to the teacher union bosses. I think there's a good basis for this.

When you were education minister, you gave the teachers a 10.4% salary increase and 12.5% to the secondary panel in 2008, at a time when we were in a deep recession. We were \$20 billion in debt and many families—the 85% not on the government payroll—had pay losses, pay freezes or lost their jobs. Instead of being chagrined about that, you seemed to celebrate that.

Let me put the question again. Mr. Coran basically is referencing the ability to open up the current agreement to seek improvements from the teacher union perspective. Since he can't do that on his own, the Premier or her education minister must have given an indication you're open to that. Premier, will you close the door on this or are you open to changing the collective agreement?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I've been very clear, Mr. Speaker, that there is no more money to put into these contracts. I've been very clear about that, and the leadership of OSSTF understands that and has been willing to engage in a conversation with us.

I've also been clear that there needs to be a new collective bargaining process in place. There needs to be a process that recognizes the provincial level, recognizes the local level, and that that needs to be formalized.

There were other issues, Mr. Speaker, that OSSTF had identified. These are not—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Renfrew, come to order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —money to the system and we have said that we would engage in a conversation with them about those issues.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The reality is that we need—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): First of all, time's up. Second of all, right after I speak, you just carry on as if I didn't even say anything, so I would appreciate at least acknowledgment for a few seconds.

Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Thank you, Speaker. I listened very closely to the Premier's response and my concerns have become stronger. You're parsing words here. You did not say no. You have left the door open, clearly, to revisiting the collective agreement. I hope that you will take this opportunity to actually shut this down once and for all and say that's off the table. You haven't done so to date.

Other concerns I have on Mr. Coran's letter: He talks about the consequences of taking on the teachers' union, and then he lists a number of the results of his actions. Specifically, he claims and boasts that he stole the ability

of the Liberals to form a majority government; he boasted he influenced Dalton McGuinty's decision to resign his premiership; he boasted he kept Laurel Broten from seeking the leadership of her party; and he boasted they forced the repeal of Bill 115 when the Liberals fully intended to keep it on the books for three years.

The union boss is practically chortling. This kind of political arrogance by the union leaders, I think, has no part in the education system in the province of Ontario. Why do you want to give even more power to the unions?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: It's interesting. I actually wouldn't expect the Leader of the Opposition, on this particular issue—

Interjections.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I would not actually expect the Leader of the Opposition to understand why we think it's important for the government to be able to work in partnership with the people who work in our schools, because my experience of the party opposite is that they really don't believe in or support publicly funded education.

One of the reasons that many of us got involved in provincial politics was because, under that government, the previous government, there was a relationship in tatters between the provincial government and the education sector.

We believe in publicly funded education, Mr. Speaker. We are going to work in partnership with the education sector. That is absolutely part of our DNA as Liberals. We're going to continue to do that, and that is in the best interests of the students in our schools. I would expect the Leader of the Opposition to at least support that.

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TEACHERS

Mr. Tim Hudak: I want to call the Premier's attention to a second rather odious document, and that's the ETFO provincial takeover bulletin in the name of another one of the Premier's personal friends and allies, Sam Hammond. Mr. Hammond says on page 6 of the memo that teachers "deemed to be in non-support during a job action may be subject to disciplinary procedures that include the possibility of monetary fines of up to \$500 per day." The Premier is aware that they have also talked about naming and shaming teachers who defy the wishes of the union bosses.

I want to give the Premier the opportunity to divorce herself from these types of tactics by the unions. Will you stand in your place, Premier, as members of the PC caucus do, and condemn the fines that unions have threatened on teachers—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Be seated, please.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, if the Leader of the Opposition wants to have a conversation with one of the organizations, the Leader of the Opposition can do that. He can talk to ETFO, he can talk to OSSTF about their internal politics. What I think is important, Mr. Speaker, is that we recognize that the teachers in our schools, the support staff in our schools, deserve our respect. They deserve a government that is willing to work with them—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Chatham, come to order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —to make sure that the students—and the students are here—

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Students deserve a government that will work for them.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: That's right—and the student trustees—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Nepean–Carleton, come to order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you very much to the member from Nepean–Carleton, because the student trustees who are here today, who represent students across the province, Mr. Speaker, came in to talk to us today about the reality that in their schools, extracurriculars are coming back. They are concerned that in some places they're not and they wanted to talk with us about how to celebrate what's coming back and encourage teachers to continue and resume those activities. It's a very good-news story, Mr. Speaker, for the students.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I guess there's one thing the Premier and I agree on; the Premier and I agree that there is an imbalance in the power between the union leaders and front-line teachers, principals and parents. The problem is that the Premier thinks we need to give more authority to the union leadership. We stand with the classroom teachers. We stand with the students. We stand with the parents and the taxpayers who fund the system.

Some have said that the teacher-union bosses have no greater ally than Kathleen Wynne; they've had no greater ally in the Premier's chair in their history. I want to know where your loyalties actually lie. How can you actually not respond to my questions—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Attorney General, come to order.

Mr. Tim Hudak: —Sam Hammond? How can you not condemn the notion of fining a teacher who wants to stay after school to help out a special-needs kid learn the opportunity to read? How can you not condemn that? Whose side are you on?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Speaker, my allegiance and my loyalty lies with the students; it lies with the kids

in our schools who deserve to have the most supportive, the most enriched environment possible.

My other loyalty lies with civil society. The reality is that the Leader of the Opposition completely negates, by his attack on organized labour, by his attack and his characterization of people who have come together to improve working conditions—he denies the gains that have been made over hundreds of years: safety; working conditions; a guarantee that we will have safe places to work all across all sectors, not just in education but across all sectors. He denies the gains that have been made by organized labour. I reject that notion categorically, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: The question, Speaker, that I have for the Premier is a question of where her loyalties truly lie. When we see this type of union political arrogance displayed by Mr. Hammond, by Mr. Coran, the union bosses, I would expect a Premier who wants to stand up for students to condemn those tactics—they are odious tactics—and to stand up for teachers—and unions.

Premier, they positively boast—and mock your former education minister and what they did to her career. I wonder where your loyalties lie when you simply accept that and not stand up for one of your colleagues within cabinet.

Premier, my final question—my dad was a principal, and he was a damn good principal. He had the ability to decide the teachers that would be in the classroom, to decide to reward those teachers and decide who would be hired out of those for long-term leave.

Why are you stripping that power away from principals to decide who the best teachers are? Why are you handing that power instead to the union activists? I think principals should make those decisions.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I don't know how old the dad of the Leader of the Opposition is, but his dad would have been part of a federation if he was a principal before Mike Harris was the Premier. So he was part of that organized labour organization that created the working conditions, that created the supports, for students in our schools.

Mr. Speaker, my loyalty, our loyalty, lies with the students in the classroom. We want to make sure that government is working in partnership with the education sector, with school boards, with teachers, with support staff, to make sure that students have the supports they need so they can succeed—and part of that is having extracurriculars. That's why it was so important that we engage with the leadership—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Renfrew, come to order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —and make sure that we can re-establish that respectful conversation, so that we can have some success going forward. That's what has happened. I would expect them to be celebrating.

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. As the Premier knows, I've put forward some concrete proposals to get some results in this session. I'm wondering whether the Premier will commit to making life more affordable by giving the Financial Services Commission a mandate to reduce auto insurance rates in this province by 15%.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'll have the Minister of Finance speak to the specifics, but I have been very clear that this is one of the issues that I think we can work together on, because we have recommendations from the anti-fraud task force. I've been clear that I'm interested in having those implemented. I'm also interested, if there's money to be saved by the implementation of those recommendations, that we sit down with the industry, we make sure that those savings are passed on to the premium holders. We agree that there's work to be done in the auto insurance industry, and I think it's something that we can work on together.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: In 2010, the Liberal government changed the rules around auto insurance benefits. As a result, insurance companies were able to save \$2 billion a year already, but drivers saw their premiums rise in this province. Now we're being told that stopping fraud is the answer to getting rates down. Does the Premier really believe that putting more money in insurance companies' pockets, with no strings attached, is going to make insurance more affordable for the drivers of the province?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Thank you for the question. Let's be clear: We are in the midst of trying to renegotiate and understand how we can lower rates all around. We've already had a discussion about this in the last year; we've got a report before us to look at the root cause of those problems. We also recognize that auto rates went up 43% in the last three years that the Conservative government was in power, and they went up 26% when the NDP was in power.

In the last year, the rates actually went down by 0.26%. So we have made some headway, but more needs to be done. I recognize what you've asked us to do, and I'll work with you. I encourage that discussion so we can look for better ways to make it more affordable for all concerned.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Another round of "no strings attached" giveaways are not going to help drivers who are feeling the pinch. I need to know, straight out: Is the Premier going to defend the status quo that leaves everyday people in this province paying more and more for insurance every year, or is she ready to deliver some real, concrete results for drivers?

Hon. Charles Sousa: We aren't going to stay in the status quo; we recognize that we need to improve this. So

we are going to take every step necessary to do that. We'll work with you, and with all of you, to try to make it happen. We're working with the industry; we're having those discussions as well. We recognize that the commitment that we've made in their recommendations is to require the insurance to provide claimants a reason for denying the claim. We recognize that we need to increase the role of the claimants in those fraud-prevention activities, and we need to prohibit the overcharging of goods and services provided for accident victims.

Let's be clear: In Ontario, things are more expensive than they are in any other parts of Canada. Those are the issues that we've got to resolve as well, and we'll take those steps necessary.

I do appreciate the recommendations brought forward, but we can't make this a band-aid solution. We have to get at the causes of the issue so that we can resolve them and get over the systemic issue that's creating the problem.

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: On the 22nd of March, 2012, the then Minister of Transportation said about New Democrats' efforts to bring fairness to the auto insurance industry this: "What this bill does is it opens a dialogue. It starts a discussion about a badly understood area that I think we all need to know more about."

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We can discuss it, but at the end of the day, we know it costs insurance companies about \$226 less per person to insure a safe driver, but that hasn't stopped premiums from going up. Why does the Premier think it's more important to give auto insurance companies a no-strings-attached giveaway than it is to give safe drivers a break?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The Minister of Finance has said we're not happy with the status quo. We know there's more that needs to be done.

I understand that the leader of the third party needs to get her issues on table, but we've said that we want to address this; we want to deal with this. We believe that there are changes that need to be made. We want to implement the recommendations of the anti-fraud task force, and as the Minister of Finance has said, we want to get to the root of the problem. We don't want to just band-aid it over; we want to make sure that we understand what's causing the rates to go up, what the issues are in the system, and work with the industry to make sure that those savings are passed along to the premium holders. I think that's the issue that the leader of the third party is addressing: How do we make sure that the premium holders see the benefit of the changes that are made in the system?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Ontario families are ready for action that actually puts them first for a change. They saw the Liberal government take action in 2010 to save the auto insurance industry \$2 billion a year. That's \$226 the insurance companies are saving on each and every

driver in Ontario thanks to the largesse of the Liberal Party.

But Brian from the GTA knows what that means for everyday drivers. I'm going to quote from something he sent us: "Over the last three years, my insurance has gone up \$20 a month every year like clockwork."

Will the Premier agree that making auto insurance more affordable for drivers like Brian by reducing their rates by 15% this year is an achievable goal and that we'll see it in the budget?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the Minister of Finance,

Hon. Charles Sousa: There has been a number of recommendations that have been made by the NDP. Certainly the private member's bill that has come forward has talked about some of the ideas and solutions, many of which, however, would create greater rates in the other parts of the province. We know that there has to be an understanding as to what's going to happen, and in some respects, we have to be more restrictive, especially with those who are drunk drivers and others. Some of the suggestions would actually reduce the rates for those who have violated the system. That can't happen. We don't want to then penalize those who do have a good rating. Those are things that we've got to resolve, and that has to take a bit more thought, so we need to have those discussions on an ongoing basis.

But, as I've said, we recognize—

Interjections.

Hon. Charles Sousa: And we'll work with you too. We are going to do what's necessary to make this work.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, Linda from Brampton knows the real story. I'll quote from something she sent us—

Interjections.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Maybe the Liberals don't like to listen to the people of Ontario, but New Democrats certainly do.

"I'm 48 years of age. I have been driving since I was 16. I have a clean record—no accidents—ever...."

"My insurance has just increased to \$3,800 a year. This is outrageous."

"My wages are not increasing at such a rate."

I'm sure Linda agrees with everyone in this Legislature that we need to crack down on fraud. I think everybody agrees about that. But the Liberal government has already given auto insurance companies \$2 billion a year in savings.

Will the Premier finally commit to saving drivers 15% on their insurance rates this year?

Hon. Charles Sousa: As I've already explained, our rates actually went down last year, not to the extent that we would like and certainly not at 15%. But we also have to recognize that we need to do even better for the long term, and some of the suggestions being made, unfortunately, are going to actually increase rates for other parts

of Ontario. We've got to be fair right across the province—but that's what's going to happen.

To all members: We understand the proposal being put forward. We are looking at ways in which we can reduce the rates even further, but we can't make it just arbitrary. We have to make sure it makes sense for the long term, and that's what we'll do. We'll review it, and we'll work in conjunction with all parties.

SCHOOL EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: To the Premier: Premier, I listened intently to your responses to my leader, Tim Hudak, who was firmly standing behind students in this chamber, asking whether or not you would condemn a memorandum by Sam Hammond of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, who threatened to name and shame, sanction and fine members who decided they would put students first and continue on with extracurriculars. I was shocked by your stunning silence.

We also have mentioned several times in this chamber a memo that was leaked to us on Sunday from OSSTF that took credit for a number of things, including the resignation of Dalton McGuinty, the demotion of Laurel Broten and the NDP win in Kitchener-Waterloo. Things have changed, Premier, after they gave you a \$10,000 donation to your campaign. The question we have before us today is: Why won't you put students first? Why are you standing behind these union leaders? What did you promise them in exchange for that money?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That's not appropriate. I ask the member to withdraw.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I actually think the question that is before us is: Why isn't everyone in this House supporting the notion that students should have their extracurriculars back? Why isn't the member opposite pleased that the OFSAA swim meet is going to be held? Why isn't the member opposite pleased that in schools around the province, teachers are working with students and giving them permission slips so that they can take part in extracurriculars? Why isn't the member opposite pleased that as of Monday, there were extracurriculars coming back into schools? That's what the student trustees talked to us about this morning. Why isn't the party opposite very pleased that government is working in partnership with the education sector so that students can have their extracurriculars?

I am committed to making sure that that partnership works in the best interest of the education sector—teachers, support staff and students.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's very clear that this Premier thinks it's okay for union leaders to sanction their members for helping students—and withholding extracurriculars. That Premier knows full well that not all extracurriculars will be restored. She knows that they're not

there in elementary schools at the moment. She also knows that her friend Ken Coran cannot guarantee that all of his teachers will be giving extracurricular activities again. We also know that this could happen in the future if there is further labour disruption and those union leaders get angry at either this government or another one.

So I ask her: Why did she stand there yesterday, firmly behind the union bosses, thumbing her nose at Ontario students, when all we want for our kids is the best education possible, a full education for our students? Why does she stand behind—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Stop the clock for a moment.

I will repeat my charge from yesterday, and that is: We race to the top and not to the bottom. I do realize that emotions are involved when we talk about these kinds of things, but I would also challenge us to continue to treat each other with the utmost respect.

I will not tolerate, when I do get quiet, people starting it all over again immediately after I finish speaking.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. No matter the decibel level, no matter the attack, no matter the rhetoric, I know that it's my responsibility to work with my colleagues, to work with the Minister of Education, to make sure that we have the best working relationship possible with the education sector. There is no doubt in my mind—I believe it absolutely, viscerally—that if we are going to continue to have the best education system in the English-speaking world, if our students are going to continue to graduate from high school and go on to university, to college, to trades, if we're going to have that economic growth that we need, if we're going to have the jobs that we need, we've got to have that partnership with the education sector. It's all interconnected. That's why it's very important that we have extracurriculars in our schools and we continue to work with the education sector.

1100

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la première ministre. More than a year after the crisis at Ornge emerged, Ontarians are still wondering: How come it went so wrong?

Yesterday, the air ambulance bill was reintroduced, and it gives the government greater power, such as the ability to appoint a supervisor. But the reality is that the government ignored problems for years, in spite of whistle-blowers and in spite of warnings. You did not use the power you already had.

Can the Premier explain to Ontarians, after hundreds of millions of dollars were wasted, after the ministers failed in her basic responsibility to provide oversight over Ornge, why would anyone believe that her government would take action this time around?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are taking action. I think everyone in the Legislature agrees that the leadership at Ornge let the people of Ontario down, that what happened there was unacceptable, and we've heard the Minister of Health speak to that many, many times.

The legislation that is being introduced addresses those issues and puts more oversight in place and tightens up the monitoring of the organization. That's exactly what a responsible government does, Mr. Speaker: It learns from situations, puts in place the remedies for those issues, and works to make sure that they never, ever happen again. That's what that legislation is about.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ontarians are once again told that they should trust the government to do the right thing, even though with Ornge this government has consistently failed to do so.

In the so-called new era that is upon us of full accountability and transparency measures, all of them should be on the table. Yet Ornge won't be subject to Ombudsman oversight and it cannot be called to a government committee. Some would say that there are loopholes big enough to fly a helicopter through in this bill.

If the Premier is serious about getting Ornge back on track, if she's serious about rebuilding the confidence in our air ambulance service, she will commit to full transparency and accountability, and that means allowing Ombudsman oversight and committee access.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As a result of much of the discussion that has happened in this House on this issue, there were changes made to the legislation. The legislation will allow the appointment of special investigators or a supervisor when it's in the public interest to do so; appoint members to Ornge's board of directors; prescribe terms of the performance agreement; provide whistleblowing protection for staff who disclose information to an inspector; and also subject Ornge to freedom-of-information requests, which I think is something that the member opposite had looked for.

There has been an impact that the member opposite has had on this legislation. I think that is a good indicator of the government learning from a situation that should not have taken place and working to make sure it doesn't happen again. We thank the member opposite for input into that legislation.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): New question? The member from Scarborough-Rouge River.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. I'm quite aware of what my responsibilities are.

The member took his seat, so I will recognize the member from Nipissing.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, my question is for the Premier. Yesterday, we delved into the Oakville gas plant

documents, code-named Project Vapour. As a cabinet member, you had these documents back in 2011, so let's look a little deeper into the pages and let's see what you can recall.

This one, entitled Confidential Advice to the Cabinet, should help ring a bell. It goes into great detail for you about Project Vapour and even offers a sample news release with a particular spin, which I suppose you agreed to.

Premier, will you acknowledge you were quite familiar with Oakville's Project Vapour back in 2011?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the government House leader.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound and the member from Northumberland-Quinte West are warned.

Hon. John Milloy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think the honourable member knows that the issue of documents and document disclosure is a topic that is being looked at by a committee of the Legislature.

It's interesting that the honourable member talks about press releases. I'd like to share a press release with him and the rest of the Legislature. Saturday, September 24, 2011, just before the 2011 election, a statement by Mississauga South Ontario PC candidate Geoff Janoscik on the Loreland Avenue power plant press conference: "Unlike the Dalton McGuinty Liberals, the only way to guarantee this power plant does not get built is to elect a Tim Hudak Ontario PC government. A Tim Hudak government will cancel this plant."

Again, Mr. Speaker, I bring this forward because we're looking forward to the committee to hear about the policy analysis and the costing that was done by the Progressive Conservatives, and we look forward to all their documents coming forward.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: To the Premier: On September 25, you stood in this House and said all of the documents have been released or the documents are available. However, it's clear you knew of the existence of Project Vapour documents over a year earlier. Premier, you're saying one thing, but the absolute and complete opposite of that is proven here to be accurate. I realize your advisers are telling you to keep quiet about Oakville, but that's not good enough for Ontarians.

Premier, will you strike the select committee you've already agreed to in writing so we can finally get to the truth from you?

Hon. John Milloy: Again, Mr. Speaker, there is a committee of the Legislature which is looking into the document issue. The Premier has indicated her co-operation; our government has indicated their overall co-operation. But, again, I've brought to the House press releases, news articles, quotations and speeches. We've gone to Twitterverse; we've gone to YouTube. All we've found over and over again is the opposition of the Progressive Conservative Party to both these plants and how they would cancel them if they won the election.

Again, Mr. Speaker, we're looking forward to hearing from experts that they consulted, to seeing the documents they bring forward of what I imagine was a very detailed policy analysis and costing, as they have put so much weight on this issue.

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Premier. Taxi drivers in Hamilton have lost their taxi insurer, causing unprecedented insurance rate increases. Some rates have gone from \$5,000 last year to \$18,000 this year with no change in the driver's record. Many have to park their taxis and their licences, leaving Hamilton with a significant loss of available taxi service.

Will the Premier require the Minister of Finance to direct the Financial Services Commission of Ontario to launch an investigation into why affordable insurance is not available for these struggling people?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Thank you for the question. Again, I'll look into it, because if that's the case and if people are being put out of a job—and I don't appreciate or understand how it is that there are no taxis in Hamilton; my impression is that there are. So I have to understand more specifically what's causing this to take place, and yes, I commit to looking into it.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: Speaker, this is yet another example of an auto insurance system that just isn't working for people or drivers. These are women and men who are working hard every day just to get by. For many of them, \$18,000 a year in new auto insurance premiums literally wipes them out.

Speaker, is the Premier—the Premier—ready to admit that this is a system that isn't working, and will she direct the Minister of Finance to ensure some real relief for these taxi drivers, who are in serious danger of losing their livelihoods?

Hon. Charles Sousa: My impression is it's not something that's exclusive to Hamilton; it's probably right across the urban centres of Ontario. There are issues, and I have spoken to a number of limousine and taxi companies. They recognize the input costs are at times prohibitive. That's one of the reasons that we're looking at auto insurance and finding ways to make them more competitive. Yet again, this is not something that is only exclusive to just the taxi drivers; it's actually something that has issues throughout. But I am looking into it and, as I said, I will commit to delving into your particular issue specifically.

1110

ANTI-BULLYING INITIATIVES

Ms. Soo Wong: My question today is for the Minister of Education.

As we all know, today is Pink Shirt Day, and I'm very pleased the members of the Legislature are wearing pink to support a national anti-bullying initiative started in Nova Scotia after a grade 9 student was bullied in his school for wearing pink. Young people across Canada are wearing pink today to draw attention to the health effects of bullying.

According to a 2011 report by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, nearly one in three Ontario students report being bullied at school. These instances of bullying come with harmful effects. Our students feel isolated and are afraid to come to school. When students do not feel safe in school, they will not perform well. I know that it is important for all members in the House that we work towards eliminating bullying in our schools.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister: Please inform this House about what the government is doing to address bullying in our schools.

Hon. Liz Sandals: I'd like to thank the member from Scarborough—Agincourt for the question and for her advocacy on behalf of the students in her constituency. I'd like to thank all the members—from all three parties, I would like to note—who are wearing pink today in recognition of Pink Shirt Day, because it is important that we all take a stand and say that we will not accept bullying in our schools and we will not tolerate it in our society. I'm so glad that students in Ontario are taking a stand today against bullying. All across Ontario, there are kids wearing pink.

All of our children deserve to learn in a safe, accepting and inclusive environment, and that's what I want for my grandchildren. They should not be afraid to go into the classroom, and that's why we have got the Accepting Schools Act against bullying.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Soo Wong: Initiatives like Pink Shirt Day show that our young people want to stand up to bullying. I know that the students are also doing the same in my riding of Scarborough—Agincourt. But we know that bullying does not only happen in our classrooms; it occurs on the Internet, on websites like Facebook and Twitter. We also know that there have been tragic incidents of young people taking their lives because of bullying they have experienced in the classroom and online.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister: Can you please inform this House of what our government is doing on combating bullying outside the classroom?

Hon. Liz Sandals: We know that bullying doesn't stop outside the walls of the school. What often happens at home at night can be just as damaging. That's why, for the first time, we've recognized cyberbullying in legislation. In our schools, if a principal believes that actions that occurred online had a negative impact on the school climate, the principal has the legislative authority to take action.

Within the Accepting Schools Act, we include cyberbullying explicitly as part of the definition of bullying. That allows the principal to deal with those things that take place outside of the school, but that's not all we're

doing to help our students. We've provided bullying-prevention training for up to 25,000 teachers and for 7,500 principals and vice-principals. We're also working with the Kids Help Phone people to have a service available 24-7 for our students.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Steve Clark: My question is to the Premier. On September 25 last year, you stood in this House and, in defending the indefensible, made a shocking statement about the gas plant scandal. You said, "To my mind, we're dealing with a situation of manufactured discontent; that the opposition is deciding to create and fabricate." In other words, you blamed us. Well, let's look at what has happened since then: The former Premier and his energy minister have both resigned and now we're on our third round of document releases, despite assurances, including your own, that we had them all the first time.

After all of that, do you still believe that this \$1.3-billion scandal, which has outraged Ontarians, was still made up by us?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: I can only repeat for the honourable member that, on the issue of the production of documents—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Leeds—Grenville, come to order. Last warning.

Hon. John Milloy: On the production of documents, Mr. Speaker, there is a standing committee of the Legislature that, I believe, will begin its work into looking at it tomorrow, and they will have a chance to examine all the issues and call the witnesses they want coming forward.

But, you know, Mr. Speaker, it's a little unclear what the opposition wants on this. First, we offer a standing committee; they say they don't want it. Then the member from Cambridge says that he doesn't want a public inquiry because it's too expensive, and then the member from North Bay holds a press conference saying they want a public inquiry. During the whole case, Mr. Speaker—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. When I was sitting, I told the member from Leeds—Grenville that it was his last warning. I did not imply that it was a warning—but now he has one.

Carry on.

Hon. John Milloy: As I say, Mr. Speaker, the member from Cambridge says a public inquiry is too expensive; the member from Nipissing says that he wants a public inquiry. We offer them a select committee, they say they want a select committee, and then they vote against it by going forward with a mean and vindictive motion.

While all of this is going on, we have the Leader of the Opposition standing up and pledging to vote against a budget that hasn't even been written yet.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's time the official opposition figured out what they need.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Steve Clark: Premier, I can't believe that on Pink Shirt Day, you referred this question to the biggest bully who has been bullying us since the last election—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I find that unacceptable. Withdraw.

Mr. Steve Clark: Withdrawn.

Premier, I still don't think you're taking this seriously. I want to remind you that we are asking for a select committee on Project Vapour or whatever code name you people are calling it this week. This \$1.3-billion scandal is the biggest in Ontario history. In the midst of a tight election campaign, you and your party decided to save a handful of Liberal seats, sacrificing a billion dollars of taxpayers' money.

You know what happened, because you co-chaired the campaign. So I'm asking you, will you admit today that you were wrong when you helped make that decision during the campaign? You were wrong in September when you blamed the opposition and you're wrong by refusing—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Government House leader?

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, it was a tight election campaign. That's why the Mississauga South PC candidate engaged in robocalls. Again, let me remind you: "Hi there. This is Geoff Janoscik, your Mississauga South Ontario PC candidate. I'm calling about the McGuinty-Sousa power plant that the Liberal government decided to build in your backyard. I'm against this power plant, and as your MPP, I will fight to stop the power plant from being built.... Our team has been out knocking on doors every single evening for several months, talking about the power plant and making sure that we defeat the Liberals in this riding and put an end to their bad decisions."

As the Leader of the Opposition said, Mr. Speaker, if they had been elected, the power plant would have been "done, done, done."

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. Families in London have been hit hard by manufacturing job losses. They saw jobs disappear overnight when Caterpillar pulled up stakes and now they're seeing it with Diamond Aircraft. The latest layoff announcement puts over 200 more families out in the cold in that community.

Can the Premier please explain to these workers why her government threw \$10 million at a foreign-owned company without ironclad job guarantees?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I appreciate the question coming from the leader of the third party. Of course, as she

alluded to, this government first and foremost is concerned for the workers and their families who have been affected by this layoff. It's clear: We all know and are sensitive to the fact that losing a job is never easy, particularly under these circumstances. Too many families in this province are still struggling, so there's a lot of work to do.

This reminds us of the work that this government is committed to, to keeping Ontario's economy vibrant and strong and, as was mentioned in the throne speech, economic growth and job creation is one of the top priorities. Its investments continue, and certainly, as I mentioned yesterday as well, with opportunities like the Southwestern Ontario Development Fund, we will continue to pursue opportunities. But this is never good news for the province.

1120

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the reality is that the workers in the manufacturing sector of this province are actually looking for a job strategy that works. I think everybody realizes that we can't save every job, but when people see companies handed public money, only to turn around and then lay off workers, they want some real answers. When will this government—

Interjection.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The previous economic development and trade minister is having a hard time with this one, Speaker. Nonetheless, these people actually want some answers.

When will this government take our advice about actually incentivizing job creation and tying investment dollars to job guarantees in this province?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: It's important to recognize that since the bottom of the recession in June 2009, this province and this government have created, together with the private sector, nearly 400,000 net new jobs.

I should point out that our commitment to the manufacturing and advanced manufacturing sector is strong. In fact, since the recession, Ontario has created nearly 32,000 new manufacturing jobs. This is such an important sector to the Ontario economy; it's the bedrock of our economy. Nearly 700,000 people are employed in it. But the news recently has been good. The jobs are coming back. In the first 10 months of 2012 alone, the manufacturing average employment increased by nearly 8,000 jobs, and our commitment through my ministry and through this government to continue to invest in our manufacturing sector remains strong, and we're beginning to see those results.

CO-OPERATIVE HOUSING

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. In Scarborough Southwest, there's quite a bit of co-operative housing. As I'm sure you are aware, currently, co-operative housing tenants and providers must take any disputes they may have through the legal system and cannot take

advantage of the less costly Landlord and Tenant Board, as is the case with most residential landlords and tenants. Additional legal fees associated with going through the court system can cost as much as \$5,000 per dispute and can be a lot for co-operative housing providers to take on.

I know that there has previously been legislation introduced in this House that would have worked to amend these issues. Mr. Speaker, could the minister please tell us what our government is doing now to ensure that a fairer system is in place to benefit our non-profit housing providers?

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: I want to thank the member for his question, and I want to say that our government certainly understands the very important role that co-op housing providers play in providing affordable housing in Ontario.

We also know that the current process for resolving co-op tenure disputes can be time-consuming and expensive for both the co-op housing providers as well as their members, which is why I'm pleased to inform the member in the House today that this afternoon I will be reintroducing the legislation that will amend the Co-operative Corporations Act and the Residential Tenancies Act. If passed, this would allow co-ops to apply to the Landlord and Tenant Board to resolve certain disputes, including persistent late payment of rent, illegal behaviour and willful damage.

Our co-op housing providers have told us that these proposed reforms are a high priority. They'd save them time and money and would relieve our courts of hearing approximately 350 co-op eviction cases per year, allowing them to devote those resources to other purposes.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: Thank you, Minister. It is good to hear that our government is working to ease some of the burden that is facing our non-profit housing providers.

Minister, you mentioned that the proposed changes are important to our co-operative housing sector. I'm certain that they are, but could you please inform the House and my residents in Scarborough Southwest what discussions have gone on with the co-operative housing sector with regard to the proposed changes?

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: Going back to 2009, the ministry has been conducting substantial consultations with those in the co-operative housing sector and with the stakeholders. As many of us know, the co-op housing sector—in particular, Harvey Cooper, whom we all know and love, has been very vocal in his support for pushing for the proposed changes, and the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada, which represents the vast majority of over 550 non-profit co-ops in Ontario, is supportive of the proposals.

It's worth noting that the last time we introduced this legislation, we received support from my opposition colleagues across the aisle. I hope we can depend on them again to support this important legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to continuing to work with our co-operative housing stakeholders and all mem-

bers to ensure a strong, viable co-operative housing sector in Ontario.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is to the Premier. Premier, you have gone to great lengths to deflect and avoid talking about your role in the decision to cancel the Mississauga gas plant. Now, here's what we know: Just days before the 2011 election, the Liberal campaign team, of which you are co-chair, cancelled the Mississauga gas plant. We know that the former Minister of Finance, Mr. Duncan, admitted at committee that the decision was politically motivated, to save at-risk Liberal seats in Mississauga. We know that by your own numbers, the cancellation of the Oakville and Mississauga plants will cost at least \$230 million, while energy analysts say it will run as high as \$1.3 billion.

As the new Premier, you promised complete accountability on this scandal, including a select committee to investigate. How can you, in good conscience, stand here and not keep your promise to establish a select committee immediately?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, in 2011, three political parties made commitments in the election campaign that they would move the gas plants in both Oakville and Mississauga. We were fortunate enough to get elected and we did what we promised; we did what the other two parties promised: We relocated the gas plants.

We put the question of costs to the Ontario Power Authority. The Ontario Power Authority provided us with the documentation and the calculation of the cost. We made that information, which we received from the Ontario Power Authority, available to the opposition and the public. It's as simple as that, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Premier, you are off to a very rocky start. I don't think this is the way you planned your first few weeks. You could have prevented this by coming clean, by showing accountability, by showing respect and by being transparent. You made a commitment to the people of Ontario, and that commitment evaporated quicker than a June snow.

We all have a responsibility to ensure that the public's confidence is restored. That will not happen as long as you continue to claim that you have nothing to hide, while at the same time blocking a select committee that would get to the bottom of this scandal.

Will you finally put the public interest ahead of the interests of yourself and your party, do the right thing, and establish this select committee so it can get to the bottom of your scandal?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister of Energy.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, the opposition loves it when the Auditor General comes to this place with a report on a particular area of activity of the government. They will have the opportunity to see the report within a short number of weeks from the Auditor General. The Auditor General has the power to ask questions of anybody under oath. The Auditor General has access to every piece of paper in every ministry. He will report.

In addition to that, the other side, the opposition, voted to have a committee, the justice committee, look into all the document-related issues. They will have an opportunity, starting tomorrow and next week, to ask all the questions of anybody they want, under oath. When will they take yes for an answer?

TAXATION

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Last March, the government, through its then Minister of Finance, committed to give Trillium benefit recipients the option of receiving the benefit as a lump sum or in monthly installments. This would give flexibility to seniors and families trying to make ends meet. Why is it that a year later, this government has failed to put in place this promised change?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Thank you for the question. This is an issue. We did make that commitment that we would allow the public to have the option of receiving a lump sum payment or receiving it in advance by way of monthly payments. We've allowed, under the regulations and we actually increased the threshold, to enable that lump sum payment. More needs to be done in order for us to accommodate that request, and I'm looking into doing just that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: Next month people will be filing their income tax and it will be too late. When the government says they're committed to do it, we need to know when.

The government admitted that giving people choice helps lower-income Ontarians. Some families prefer the regularity of a monthly payment. Others, especially seniors, prefer a lump sum to help pay property taxes or other expenses. The government could have had the change in place and should have had the change in place by now. When will the government finally make good on this promise? You can't do it this year. Will you have it for next year?

1130

Hon. Charles Sousa: I agree, and I'm going to do everything I can to try to actually accelerate the process, if possible.

I know we're dealing with the federal, because of the tax issues. That's what's creating some of the delay. We're trying to find an innovative way by increasing the threshold to enable that choice to be made earlier than later.

But keep in mind—and to those who are watching—right now you're getting the monies upfront. I understand that people would prefer to have it by way of a lump sum payment. I want to make that option available to them. I'll work with both of you, from both sides, to try to put something—even if we can this year—so that we can accommodate that request.

ENDANGERED SPECIES

Mr. Bob Delaney: This question is for the Minister of Natural Resources. Minister, one of our responsibilities as a government and as custodian of our province's natural resources wealth is to pass its diversity on to the generations that follow us. This means taking proactive measures to preserve species of animals and plants whose continued existence would otherwise be threatened by human activity in Ontario.

This government updated the Endangered Species Act in 2007 for the first time in more than 35 years. The Endangered Species Act is critical to supporting the recovery of many species across the province that might otherwise die off forever and to protect Ontario's rich biodiversity.

Minister, please update the House about the status of the Endangered Species Act and its importance to protecting species at risk in the province of Ontario.

Hon. David Orazietti: I want to just take a minute and thank the hard-working member from Mississauga-Streetsville for raising this very important issue. I was also surprised to hear the leader of the official opposition claim that Ontario is doing too much to protect species at risk across the province.

Our government's Endangered Species Act is a landmark piece of legislation and a leader in North America in the area of species and habitat protection. The act balances protections for species at risk in Ontario while continuing to promote economic development, sustainable agriculture and job creation in the province of Ontario.

The goal of the ESA is to promote responsible development that allows job creation and growth to move forward while ensuring the proper precautions are taken to support the survival of at-risk species and their habitats. The ESA is about balancing our economic interests and Ontario's environmental well-being. Protecting species at risk is a non-partisan issue.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Bob Delaney: Minister, during the past five years since the implementation of the updated Endangered Species Act—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Members, please keep that somewhere else.

Mr. Bob Delaney:—governments, industries, conservation organizations and individuals have grown their body of expertise. They've identified challenges and opportunities for improving Ontario's ability to protect species of plants and wildlife—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Attorney General. The member from Renfrew, come to order.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Your ministry has recognized this and established a special panel to provide recommendations on how to improve the Endangered Species Act. How was this panel established—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. As some of my predecessors said, take it outside. It's very frustrating, particularly when somebody is that far away.

Please complete.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Thank you, Speaker. Let's finish the question.

Minister, how was this panel established, what is the status of its work and how might its recommendations improve the Endangered Species Act?

Hon. David Orazietti: Thanks again to the member for the question. As he mentioned, our government established a special panel to provide recommendations on how to improve the ESA. The panel was made up of a very good cross-section of stakeholders. For the benefit of the members opposite, it included the following: the Ontario Forest Industries Association; the Ontario Federation of Agriculture; the Ontario Stone, Sand and Gravel Association; the Ontario Waterpower Association; the Mazanaw-Lanark Forest company; as well as the Wildlands League, the Ontario infrastructure organization, the Ontario Home Builders' Association, the Ivey Foundation and the Savanta environmental consulting organization. So as you can see, there has been a very good cross-section of individuals making recommendations—29 recommendations, in fact—reaching consensus on a very important issue. Our priority continues—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. Jeff Yurek: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Minister, you come to your position when Ontario faces an unprecedented fiscal mess, created by your party. Total expenditures are the highest they've ever been, interest payments cost \$11 billion a year and credit agencies have us on watch. All of this discourages investment, and every day of inaction risks prolonging our job crisis. Bottom line: We need to rein in spending. With 55 cents of every dollar spent on public sector wages, the PC Party has sensibly proposed an across-the-board public sector wage freeze to save taxpayers \$2 billion. The PC plan is clear.

When referring to your plan, you say, "I am encouraging that our discussions going forward will result in zero." Saying the word "encouraging" is the weakest excuse for a plan I've ever heard.

My question is: Finance Minister, will you support the PC proposal for a public sector across-the-board wage freeze and actually have a plan to rein in spending?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: There are a couple of things to put into perspective. We have now reduced our spending dramatically. We already have our deficit attack; it has been going down. We're making every effort necessary to continue to address our deficit as per our economic plan, but we've got to ensure that we also grow our economy.

But let's take into consideration what you're asking. You're asking for the result of what comes to a zero-zero wage freeze. We're getting that result, and we're doing it effectively. Even arbitrated deals are coming on at zero-zero, and that's what matters more. What matters is that we provide confidence in the system and that we continue to grow our economy while addressing our economic deficit, and that's what we're doing.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

I'll take this quick moment to remind all of you that there is an event going on at noon hour for Special Olympian Diamond Jubilee Medals being distributed. All of the members who have members receiving medals have been notified.

The House recessed from 1137 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: I would like to take this opportunity to introduce some very special guests with us today. We have, from the Ontario branch of the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada, Dale Reagan, managing director; Harvey Cooper, manager of government relations; Diane Miles, manager of co-op services; Simone Swail, program manager, special initiatives; Judy Shaw, program manager of co-op services; and, from the Federation of Rental-housing Providers of Ontario, Mike Chopowick, manager of policy. Welcome.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I have great pride to introduce Brian Snyder from my riding, who is here to collect the Queen's Jubilee Medal today. I want to congratulate him on the win. He's in the west gallery.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I'd like to introduce Ron Johnson, chair of the board of governors of the College of Trades and former PC MPP for a riding very familiar to you, Mr. Speaker; also Bob Guthrie, registrar and chief executive officer for the college, and Tim Armstrong, who I don't think is here yet. Oh, here he is now. He's just having a seat. He's chair of the Ontario College of Trades appointments council. They're very hard-working people on behalf of the skilled trades.

Mr. Steve Clark: I also want to welcome our guests today, but I also want to make a special reference to some guests who are many times in our galleries, and those are the nine individuals from the Ontario Legislature Internship Programme, or OLIP. Quite often they're here in the Legislature. I think that on behalf of

opposition and government backbench MPPs, we want to thank them for participating in that program.

Ms. Soo Wong: Very shortly, some of my visitors are coming to visit us. Jessica Farias from the Mennonite New Life Centre, Scarborough campus, will be visiting us, along with new seniors in my riding coming to join us shortly.

Mr. Rod Jackson: I'd like to take a moment to introduce Sam Bokma from my constituency in Barrie. She does a great job serving the residents of Barrie, and I'm very proud to have her as part of my team. Welcome, Sam.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

NATIONAL BLIND CURLING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Mr. Toby Barrett: It's with pride that I report to members of this House that Team Canada now hails from the town of Simcoe. After three years of working together towards the goal of winning championships, Jim Simmons, Donna Hawkins, Mike Vrooman and Gary Saxon laid claim to the national team moniker, bringing home the National Blind Curling Championship in Ottawa earlier this month.

This accomplishment follows the Simcoe rink's successful run for the all-Ontario title a year ago. And it's not easy, Speaker. Teams from all corners gave all they could to compete for, first, provincial and then national bragging rights.

In the Ottawa series, after seven rounds of competition, it was a semi-final win over New Brunswick that led the Simcoe curlers to the final against the 2012 Team Canada champions out of Kitchener. Eight ends later, the Simcoe representatives stood victorious 7-3.

As well, Speaker, Mr. Vrooman was named a second team all-star for the tournament, while Mr. Simmons was named second team skip. Mr. Saxon was named the first team lead, while Miss Hawkins was named to the first team in the vice position.

My only concern, Speaker: that the Simcoe rink has enough of that ice magic to defend their provincial honours for the 2013 Ontario Blind Curling Championships, coming up in the town of Simcoe March 15 to 17.

MARION BRYDEN

Mr. Michael Prue: I rise today to inform the House of the passing of Marion Bryden, a former MPP. Marion Bryden died on the 12th of February of this year.

Marion was born in Winnipeg and had a very distinguished career prior to coming to this House. She was one of the first people hired by the NDP government of Tommy Douglas in Saskatchewan, and it was a hard time for her to get the job, because at that point she was a married woman and there was a policy in Saskatchewan

that no married woman could work in the civil service. Tommy Douglas had to go to bat and say that he was hiring her because she was the most qualified person and that he insisted on having a qualified woman to do the job that she did.

She was a researcher in economics. She worked for the Saskatchewan government for a number of years before coming back to Toronto, where she worked as a researcher and a budget forecaster for a couple of places, including the Canadian Tax Foundation. When she was there, she authored two books on tax policy which are, in some ways, still being used today. She worked, along with her husband, Ken—who was also, at one time, a member—to form the NDP from the CCF in 1961.

In 1967, she came to this place to work for the NDP as the research director on economic policy, and from 1975 to 1990, she was a member in this Legislature, through five elections and five Parliaments. In 1975, when she was elected, she was one of only seven women in this House. She had a record of being here for 15 years and, until that time, she had the longest service of any woman in this Legislature; 15 years was the record at that point. She was a critic for treasury, economics, revenue, the environment, women's issues, colleges and universities, and intergovernmental affairs.

She was loved, I think, by everyone, but more importantly, she loved this Legislature and the people who work here. She is truly missed by the people of Beaches—East York and by the many women for whom she helped to pave the way.

MARLENE STEWART STREIT

Ms. Helena Jaczek: On February 6 of this year, I attended the investiture ceremony for a resident of my riding of Oak Ridges—Markham: Marlene Stewart Streit, who was awarded the Order of Ontario for excellence in golf. Ms. Streit is Canada's most successful female amateur golfer and the first Canadian inducted into the World Golf Hall of Fame. She is the only golfer to have won the Australian, British, American and Canadian women's amateur competitions. She became an icon for young Canadian female golfers when she created the Marlene Streit Awards Fund, which is used to pay the travel costs for promising junior golfers.

Her life has taken extraordinary turns. Born in Alberta in 1934, her family farmed through years of locust infestations and sandstorms before moving to Fonthill, Ontario. At age 12, Marlene caddied at Lookout Point golf club to earn extra money. Two years later, she started playing, and at age 17 she won her first Canadian championship.

Surviving a plane crash in the 1950s, she helped lead other passengers to safety. Married with two daughters, she has continued to play through the ensuing decades and even won the US Senior Women's Amateur contest in 2003.

Bright, bubbly and energetic, Marlene tweeted recently that she'll be thrilled to be back at Lookout Point

for this year's Senior PGA tournament. It is an honour to recognize Marlene's determination, dedication and accomplishments with the Order of Ontario.

BEN SMITH

Ms. Laurie Scott: I would like to take this opportunity to recognize one of my constituents, Ben Smith from Brock township. Ben is a well-respected business owner and a self-proclaimed old-school pharmacist. Since he opened Ben's Pharmacy in Cannington in 1982, Ben has gone on to open a dozen pharmacies around Ontario. He is a living example of a small-business success story. At the age of 70, he still works the front counter to personally meet the needs of his customers and hosts an annual customer-appreciation golf tournament.

Ben has been a long-time contributor to his community. He has donated funds to community causes, sponsored local minor sports organizations and community events and has provided scholarships for kids in local public schools. His community recently honoured Ben's effort by awarding him a Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Medal.

However, Ben's accomplishments are also of a professional nature. He is the president-elect of the American College of Apothecaries and will be inducted for a two-year term next February at their annual meeting in California. This is a rare honour, for a Canadian pharmacist to achieve this role from his peers. I would like to commend Ben for all that he has contributed to his local community and to his profession, and to congratulate him.

1510

WINTER HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Mr. Speaker, yesterday in the House, I rose on a question in regard to the condition of roads across Ontario when it comes to the conditions of highways this winter. What is really, really interesting is the response that I got from the minister, saying he hadn't heard about anything because nobody had told him that the roads were in such a bad state of repair. I've got to say that I was taken a little bit aback, because I would think that the minister had been briefed on the condition of highways, because clearly there has been a change in the condition of our highways as a result of the actions of this government.

But what is even more surprising is that as he went out into the scrums, the minister said, "Well, it was all global warming"—that was the problem, and we should blame global warming and not the Liberal government for having messed up the maintenance of our highways.

Listen, we're in this mess for a very simple reason. When the Liberal government accelerated the privatization that was started by the Conservatives, the Liberals decided to maintain a standard that in fact is lesser than what MTO used to do before, because we all know that even though there was a certain standard to be main-

tained, often MTO used to plow beyond the standard that was established by the Ministry of Transportation itself.

Now that they've got contractors, they say, "Here's the standard, and you're not going to go over it because we ain't gonna pay you for it." As a result, the roads are in much worse condition. What's even worse, they've essentially privatized the patrolling of highways so that those people who actually do the dispatching as to when salt, sand and other has to be done—it is now being done by the contractors and not by ministry staff.

HEART MONTH

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: February is Heart Month in Canada. Today, heart disease and stroke takes one life every seven minutes, and 90% of Canadians have at least one risk factor. No one is safe from heart disease or stroke conditions that can be devastating, not only to individuals but entire families.

There is much we can do to protect ourselves and our loved ones. Ontarians have the power to lead a healthy lifestyle by addressing the key controllable risk factors: physical inactivity, poor diet and tobacco use.

Thanks to the generosity of Ontarians and the compassion of volunteers, the Heart and Stroke Foundation is able to continue making a real difference in reducing death and disability from heart disease and stroke, and I'm proud of our government's commitment to healthy living and chronic disease prevention as we move forward with our action plan for health care. As part of this, we are aggressively taking on the challenge to reduce childhood obesity by 20% over five years with our Healthy Kids panel. We've already implemented programs to address obesity, including EatRight Ontario and the Healthy Schools initiative, and we've committed to strengthening our Smoke-Free Ontario Strategy to have the lowest smoking rates in Canada.

Speaker, we also need to do our part in our ridings by informing our constituents about the importance of healthy living all year round.

HYDRO OPERATIONS

Mr. Victor Fedeli: The council of the city of North Bay is concerned by recommendations contained within the recently released local distribution company review panel report and the potential impact on North Bay Hydro. They're specifically concerned about the call for the creation of a northeast regional distributor that would be responsible for providing hydro to customers in a large area, including the current North Bay Hydro users. On January 21, North Bay council passed resolution 2013-40, which resolved that "the city of North Bay is not in support of amalgamating local hydro utilities, and petition the Premier of the province of Ontario and Minister of Energy once the new cabinet has been announced, to meet with representatives of the impacted municipalities."

Speaker, our caucus believes and has stated in my energy white paper that consolidations of LDCs in

Ontario should be voluntary and encouraged through incentives. I hope the new minister will honour the city of North Bay's request to meet with municipalities who may be impacted.

JAYESH'S LAW

Mr. Mike Colle: I'm here today to—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Talk about the megacity.

Mr. Mike Colle: I wish—the megacity.

I'm talking about something that's very sad, actually. A 44-year-old man who worked as a gas station attendant in my riding, Jayesh Prajapati, was dragged to his death by a gas-and-dash criminal who essentially killed a man who was working for \$10 an hour. I found out subsequently that over 10,000 of these gas-and-dashes occur every year in our province where people trying to make a living have to go to work pumping gas and risk their lives because there are no protections for these gas station workers.

I've introduced a law for the second time called Jayesh's Law, Bill 12, which will hopefully put a stop to this kind of criminality that occurs right across this province on a daily basis with very few consequences. Very few of these criminals who commit these acts ever go to trial, ever see any jail time.

This act will be an attempt to also support the many police services in Toronto, in York region and in Hamilton who want to see this kind of gas theft stopped, because it goes on in all of our communities without any accountability. It's something that endangers not only gas station operators; it endangers patrons and endangers police officers.

I hope that all members will consider this legislation as a way of dealing with this criminal activity which has been tolerated too long.

MARY VERVOORT

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I'm pleased to rise today and acknowledge an exceptionally dedicated community leader in Dufferin–Caledon.

As the executive director of Choices Youth Shelter, Mary Vervoort has made significant contributions to the well-being of many homeless youth in our community. Since it opened its doors in 2000, Mary has been a key employee at Choices Youth Shelter. With her help, this grassroots organization has grown from a discussion about the rise of homeless youth in society to a full-time physical shelter with programs that continually challenge conventional thinking and meet the needs of youth in our community.

Choices is a very unique shelter and has had tremendous community support in achieving its goals. Since its creation, Choices has helped approximately 1,800 homeless and at-risk youth in our community. Recently, Choices celebrated its latest expansion when it opened a new transitional home with the help of many community organizations, businesses and residents who generously

supported it. This support included a \$50,000 grant from the 2012 Ruth Atkinson Hindmarsh Award.

Mary is the first one to acknowledge that Choices exists because of the board of directors, volunteers and many other community contributors. However, Mary herself has made a real difference and was recognized for her hard work with the new transitional home, Mary's Place, being named in her honour.

Mary is the perfect example of how someone can help a community organization meet challenges by fulfilling a need while also helping improve the lives of others. And so on behalf of the residents of Dufferin–Caledon and the Ontario Legislature, congratulations, Mary. Keep up the great work.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Far be it from me to miss an opportunity as Speaker to introduce a former member, and I probably would pay for it if I didn't. Anyway, as the former member of Parliament for the riding of Brantford in the 36th Parliament, Mr. Ron Johnson is here with us today. Welcome.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that pursuant to standing order 98(c), a change has been made in the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business such that Ms. Fife assumes ballot item number 5 and Mr. Mantha assumes ballot item number 12.

REQUEST TO THE INTEGRITY COMMISSIONER

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I also beg to inform the House that I have laid upon the table a request by the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex, Mr. McNaughton, to Lynn Morrison, the Integrity Commissioner, for an opinion pursuant to section 31 of the Members' Integrity Act, 1994, on whether the member for Scarborough Centre, Mr. Duguid, has contravened the act or Ontario parliamentary convention.

Reports by committees. Reports by committees?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I almost forgot, Mr. Speaker.

Interjection.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: We're losing here today, for some reason.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly pursuant to standing order 111(b).

Interjections.

1520

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Dunlop presents the committee's report. Does the member wish to make a brief—

Laughter.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I actually deeply appreciate the fact that we're having jocularity today, as opposed to the other reason why somebody doesn't hear me.

Mr. Dunlop presents the committee's report. Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: No, thank you.

Laughter.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm going to send everybody a copy of this tape.

Pursuant to standing order 111(b), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

ONTARIO FORESTRY INDUSTRY REVITALIZATION ACT (HEIGHT OF WOOD FRAME BUILDINGS), 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR LA REVITALISATION
DE L'INDUSTRIE FORESTIÈRE
DE L'ONTARIO (HAUTEUR DES
BÂTIMENTS À OSSATURE DE BOIS)

Mr. Fedeli moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 13, An Act to amend the Building Code Act, 1992 with respect to the height of wood frame buildings / Projet de loi 13, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1992 sur le code du bâtiment en ce qui a trait à la hauteur des bâtiments à ossature de bois.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Unaccustomed as I am to public speaking, I'd love to make a short statement, Speaker.

The Ontario Forestry Industry Revitalization Act, 2013, would amend the Ontario building code to allow for wood frame construction to be used in mid-rise buildings up to six storeys instead of the current four storeys. There's a real opportunity here to increase the use of wood harvested in northern Ontario for residential construction and provide a significant boost to the forestry industry, which supports some 200,000 jobs and more than 100 forest-dependent communities.

Not only will it help create jobs and growth in northern communities, it will also help southern Ontario meet targets to reduce urban sprawl and reduce construction costs. Wood frame construction can reduce the carbon footprint and increase the energy efficiency of mid-rise buildings.

NON-PROFIT HOUSING
CO-OPERATIVES STATUTE LAW
AMENDMENT ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT DES LOIS
EN CE QUI CONCERNE
LES COOPÉRATIVES DE LOGEMENT
SANS BUT LUCRATIF

Mrs. Jeffrey moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 14, An Act to amend the Co-operative Corporations Act and the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 in respect of non-profit housing co-operatives and to make consequential amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 14, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les sociétés coopératives et la Loi de 2006 sur la location à usage d'habitation en ce qui concerne les coopératives de logement sans but lucratif et apportant des modifications corrélatives à d'autres lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement?

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to make my statement during ministry statements.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

CO-OPERATIVE HOUSING

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: Before I begin, I'd just like to acknowledge some of the ministers who preceded me and worked over the years on similar legislation to that being introduced here today, including Premier Wynne, as well as the member for Etobicoke Centre. I just wanted to thank them for their efforts which helped pave the way for this legislation.

Today, I'm pleased to reintroduce proposed legislation that would, if passed, bring greater efficiency, accessibility and transparency to the resolution of co-op tenure disputes. The current process for terminating occupancy agreements in co-ops is unquestionably complex, costly and time-consuming. This is true for both non-profit housing providers and their members.

The amendments I am introducing today have the support of the Co-operative Housing Federation, or CHF. Our government recognizes and appreciates the dedicated advocacy of the CHF, and we share the federation's commitment to maintaining a strong co-operative housing sector.

Non-profit co-op housing has played a vital role in our affordable housing system for over 40 years. In Ontario, there are around 550 non-profit housing co-ops. These co-ops provide affordable housing for 44,000 households, which represent about 125,000 Ontarians, including some of our most vulnerable citizens.

Currently, tenure disputes in co-op housing are governed by the Co-operative Corporations Act. Under this act, co-ops must go through what is often a lengthy and costly process in the courts to evict a resident. Today, we are proposing to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006, and the Co-operative Corporations Act to move most co-op tenure disputes from the courts to the Landlord and Tenant Board.

The Landlord and Tenant Board is the body established under the Residential Tenancies Act, or RTA, to resolve rental housing disputes. As an independent agency, the Landlord and Tenant Board provides Ontarians with timely access to specialized, expert and effective dispute resolution. Tenants and landlords have convenient access to the board's offices across the province to resolve their matters. Under the proposed legislation, co-ops would apply to the Landlord and Tenant Board to resolve tenure disputes when they are based on grounds currently provided for under the Residential Tenancies Act.

The proposed legislation is the result of significant consultation with the co-op housing sector over the past four years. Mr. Speaker, if passed, this legislation would afford co-op providers and members most of the same protections, benefits and responsibilities that are granted to landlords and tenants facing tenure disputes under the Residential Tenancies Act.

Evictions based on grounds outside the Residential Tenancies Act would continue to be handled through the internal co-op process and the courts. This is important because co-ops are governed democratically and may have bylaws that outline other reasons for eviction that are not provided for under the Residential Tenancies Act.

The proposed legislation would make tenure dispute resolution processes more efficient and reduce the financial burden on co-ops to have their disputes resolved. By going to the Landlord and Tenant Board, co-ops and their members would have access to mediation services to help them resolve their disputes.

In addition, co-op members would be able to access the Tenant Duty Counsel Program, which is funded by Legal Aid Ontario and delivered by the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario, ACTO. This will help low- and modest-income members by providing them with improved and more affordable access to justice.

Our government is fully aware of the importance of the co-op housing sector. The sector is a key partner in supporting the availability of affordable and safe housing for families throughout Ontario. These are the people for whom our government is taking strong action today. Our proposal would help support co-op providers and the families and children who call co-ops their home.

The proposed legislation would also permit the Landlord and Tenant Board to waive or defer fees for low-income individuals, and would bring consistency to how these types of cases are treated at other Ontario tribunals and in the courts. For instance, a fee waiver program was implemented in Ontario courts back in 2005, and similar provisions exist in the legislation of two other Ontario

tribunals: the Ontario Municipal Board and the Assessment Review Board.

Our government recognizes the need for affordable housing and its role in supporting the growth and health of communities across Ontario. This is why we developed the long-term affordable housing strategy, the first of its kind in Ontario.

1530

A housing sector that offers diverse choices for Ontarians is not complete without a healthy co-op sector. That is why today we're taking action and proposing this legislation. I urge all members to once again support this bill. Thank you.

ONTARIO COLLEGE OF TRADES

Hon. Brad Duguid: Today I'd like to address one of the most significant initiatives undertaken in skilled trades in Ontario for generations: the Ontario College of Trades.

In 2009, our government took the bold move to establish this regulatory body, the first of its kind in North America, as a way of ensuring a strong future for the trades, a sector that is a key part of the foundation of our economy. Today I'm pleased to confirm that this April, the College of Trades will officially open its doors and begin accepting members.

Ontario already has 44 similar regulatory bodies for other important sectors. The College of Trades will help to ensure that when the people of Ontario need the services of tradespeople, they get the skilled, well-trained—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Nepean–Carleton will come to order.

Hon. Brad Duguid: —and accountable workers they expect and the quality services that they deserve. The college will provide an independent and neutral body for consumers to go to with a complaint if those services are not up to par. If you believe in consumer protection, then you should be supportive of the new College of Trades.

As well, the college will protect the people who work in those fields from the underground economy. We have a responsibility to protect the public and a responsibility to protect our skilled tradespeople who are qualified and abide by the law. To those opposed to the creation of the College of Trades, I ask why you would so readily dismiss our responsibility to protect consumers and protect those important workers. Why do Ontario's skilled tradespeople not deserve the same respect as other professions, like lawyers, teachers, accountants, doctors, nurses, foresters, real estate agents, social workers and architects, just to name some who have similar bodies?

The skilled trades are the backbone of Ontario's economy. They are construction workers who ensure that the buildings we live and work in are constructed properly. They are auto mechanics who ensure that our cars are safe and able to protect our families on the roads. They are electricians who provide us with the safe and

reliable power we need in our homes and our offices. They are hairstylists and chefs who the public must have confidence in.

Ontario's skilled tradespeople comprise dozens of occupations and thousands of workers that we all rely on every day to keep our economy strong. That is why the College of Trades is so important. Without these workers, our economy simply could not function.

The College of Trades will put decision-making power in the hands of those who do the work and know the business. Those opposed would rather have that decision-making power in the hands of lobbyists, politicians and bureaucrats. Our government disagrees with that.

The college gives a voice to all key players, including employers, employees, union, non-union, tradespersons, apprentices, journeypersons and the public. These are the professionals who should decide what training and certification standards should be. They are the ones who have a direct stake in the quality and credibility of their industry.

When the college begins taking members on April 8, it will have enhanced enforcement capabilities that will ensure professionalism and high quality. It will provide a public register to ensure that the tradespeople you hire are in good standing so that you know, when you hire a tradesperson, that he or she is qualified to do the job. It will provide a way for consumers to file complaints, with a transparent process that can result in action being taken.

When the college is fully operational, it will help raise awareness of the career opportunities that the trades provide. It will lift up the value and credibility of the trades as an attractive career option. We need high school students to consider the trades first, not as a fallback to university or college, but as a career path that they can be proud of. We also need more women in the skilled trades. For far too long, we've not provided the encouragement, opportunities and support they need to enter and thrive in the industry. The new College of Trades can do this.

In 2007, we responded to concerns about the state of the skilled trades. We asked Tim Armstrong, who's here today—a respected lawyer and former deputy minister with knowledge of the sector—to thoroughly examine them. He recommended creating a college of trades, stating that it was crucial to the success of skilled trades in Ontario. The sector applauded Mr. Armstrong's report and in particular the call for the college.

Mr. Speaker, recent criticism has called the registration fees to be collected by the college a tax. Let me be clear: Not one cent of the registration fees collected by the College of Trades will go to the government. The college's membership fees—and that's what they are, membership fees—which are actually the lowest of any of the 44 regulatory bodies in Ontario, will offer far more in return.

We need to stand behind Ontario's skilled tradespeople and take politics out of it. We need to let this vital sector find its own voice while protecting the public interest and growing our economy. Mr. Speaker, the

College of Trades represents a bold step forward for our province.

At the same time, let us be clear and realistic. This is a first, so I call on all stakeholders and my colleagues here today to be constructive and to be patient as the College of Trades emerges as a strong champion of this vital sector. Our skilled tradespeople deserve the respect that this college will bring them, and they deserve the respect and support of all parties in this Legislature and all Canadians.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It is now time for responses.

CO-OPERATIVE HOUSING

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm not going to take much time. I want to give the member for Simcoe North as much time as possible to make his response, but I do thank the minister for reintroducing this bill.

I know that Premier Wynne, just after the House prorogued, did commit to reintroducing the previous bill, and I look forward to hearing the minister's changes that she has made, because there are some changes made to this bill.

But just in closing, I want to thank Harvey Cooper and the co-op housing federation for their tenacity and their patience in this bill, in a number of incarnations, being reintroduced in the Legislature. I think that Mr. Chopowick from the Federation of Rental-housing Providers was hiding there around the corner; I could just see him a little bit at the start of the session. I thank all of those who put their work into providing housing for our most vulnerable, and I look forward to my hour of response to the minister's lead.

ONTARIO COLLEGE OF TRADES

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Now I understand why they gave this gentleman the minister's position on this College of Trades. Look, the PC Party of the province of Ontario adamantly opposes the College of Trades. It's that simple. No offence to you fellows up in the audience; I know you are doing your very best, but you're on a losing trip here.

First of all, the whole name of the College of Trades is very confusing, because people out there in the industry think it's actually training people, and it's doing nothing like that. All it is is a new tax for people. That's what it really is.

I think of all the things they've done with the College of Trades—and I know you're really new to the file, because I can tell you I've forgotten more than you know about it, okay? I can tell you this has been a communications disaster. All you've done—a quick prop—that's a postcard that was sent out in December. Some of the tradespeople are getting that today—not all of them. That's the latest form. You can't even get your mailing right. Not everybody has it. Maybe we'll use your

mailing procedure from now on to get to the College of Trades.

The people who are going to be getting a 600% increase in their fees are all the journeypeople today and, of course, the apprentices who never received a fee before. They're going to be charged \$60, so a new trade tax is what it really is.

What is it doing? Well, they're going to send out the invoices. They're sending out the invoice to those people who have a journeyman's licence. What they really want is to compulsorily certify all of the other trades in Ontario—everything, all the other trades. They're going to have trades cops and the whole thing.

Now, the reality is we had no way of communicating this, so I actually went on the road. I've been to over a hundred towns and communities in Ontario this year, and I can't find hardly anybody who likes the College of Trades other than—

Interjection: Those folks up there.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: —those guys in the back row, the business managers for the big trades unions, and of course the Working Families Coalition. They love it.

Interjection: Pat Dillon.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Pat Dillon and the boys—they love it.

Who opposes the Colleges of Trades? Pretty well everybody: first of all, the PC Party of Ontario; second of all, the Ontario Construction Employers Coalition—

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Interjection.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Go ahead and heckle me all you want. You have no idea what you're talking about.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Focus, please.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: The reality is, Mr. Speaker, as tradespeople find out about this, this is becoming a disaster for them, and they are trying to get this thing out in front. But they're not telling everybody that it's a 600% increase in the fees. It's a new trades tax, plain and simple. You get nothing for your money on this.

What we've done is we've started a thing called the "Stop the Trades Tax Pledge." We're asking all MPPs to sign this pledge—and candidates—no matter what political party you're from. We've got a number of our people already. It's open to former MPPs as well, if they want to sign it. Former MPPs are welcome to sign it, Mr. Johnson.

The reality is, Mr. Speaker, this is a disaster. We're going to fight this all the way. And guess what? After the next election, when Tim Hudak is the next Premier of Ontario and the Progressive Conservative Party forms the government of Ontario, we will abolish the Ontario College of Trades. You can mark our words on that. It will happen. We will do it for sure.

Thank you very much. Sorry I had to be so rough on you, guys. Thanks very much.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Before I move to responses, I do want to remind members that on a few occasions I could have stopped. I wanted to let you go. We do not use props to hold up and to expose—

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I forgot, sir. Sorry.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm trying to be serious and you're not letting me be.

But anyway, I want to remind all members that we do not use props at all when we're doing responses and comments in the House, and I ask all members to be respectful of each other.

I also want to remind you of one other thing that continues to bother me: making personal comments to people in the House. That's not an appropriate thing to do.

We will continue with responses.

CO-OPERATIVE HOUSING

Ms. Cindy Forster: I'm pleased to respond to the ministerial statement and introduction of the bill to amend the Co-operative Corporations Act and the Residential Tenancies Act. I thank the minister for bringing it forward so quickly.

I also want to acknowledge that Harvey Cooper and his staff are here once again, and I want to welcome them back to the Legislature.

We, the NDP, welcome this bill. It has been a long time coming—almost 10 years, actually, since the federation first brought it forward for some action. We almost got there in the last session but for prorogation. We welcome many more bills on housing over the term of this session because we're here to get positive results for Ontarians.

We support the co-operative housing movement and we support the changes that they actually want to the legislation. It has the potential to make life easier both for the tenants and for the co-ops. It has the ability to actually reduce costs for the co-ops as well as for its members.

There is an amendment to this current bill, and we think that that is a good thing as well. It's going to actually give tenants the same opportunity that they would have had in the court system if they're from a low-income family so that they're not burdened with those additional expenses, so it is going to make it more affordable for people to actually go through these processes.

Still, it's hard to cheer for a bill when there are so many outstanding issues on housing in this province. We are in a housing crisis. Too many families are stuck on waiting lists—170,000 people at last count—and many people are paying rents in excess of 50% of their income. More than one in five families pays more than 50%. There are 400,000 people using food banks in the province of Ontario, and many tenants are living in substandard housing, so there's a need for more bills around those issues as well. We need to have many more co-ops built, though, here in the province of Ontario, because co-ops build community and they build relationships.

So although it's hard to get excited about this bill, I look forward to debating it. I hope we don't need to debate it ad nauseam, though.

Thank you for the opportunity.

ONTARIO COLLEGE OF TRADES

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Speaker, I'd like to respond to the minister's statement on the College of Trades.

The NDP supported the legislation establishing a regulatory college designed to modernize the province's apprenticeship and skilled trades system. It was our hope that the college would also encourage more people to work in the trades and help the system better serve employers, skilled trades, apprenticeships and consumers.

Among the many duties of the college outlined in the original legislation, one was to review compulsory trades applications, review apprenticeship ratios, enforcement of apprenticeship standards and discipline. From the beginning, there were to be two classes of college memberships. These were explicitly described in the original bill: journeypersons, and persons who employ journeypersons or who sponsor or employ apprentices. The process for annual membership fees was developed in the year leading up to the college's launch.

It was always a concern of ours that it would not be clear to the tradespeople what the province's apprentices and journeypersons would get for their membership fee in the college. It was our hope that the college would implement an aggressive communication plan to ensure that the province's tradespeople understood the very valuable role that the college could play for them and the value of their membership in the college. Unfortunately, it is not clear to us that the college has effectively communicated the important role it could and should play in promoting the trades in Ontario. We hope that that will change soon.

That said, Ontario New Democrats continue to support the valuable work the college is doing in reviewing the compulsory trades apprenticeship ratios, and look forward to further reports on these and other vital apprenticeship issues.

PETITIONS

AIR QUALITY

Mr. John O'Toole: It's a pleasure again to maintain the important role of representing the constituents in the riding of Durham and to present one of the first petitions. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas collecting and restoring old vehicles honours Ontario's automotive heritage while contributing to the economy through the purchase of goods and services, tourism, and support for special events; and

"Whereas the stringent application of emissions regulations for older cars equipped with newer engines can result in fines and additional expenses that discourage car collectors and restorers from pursuing their hobby; and

"Whereas newer engines installed by hobbyists in vehicles over 20 years old provide cleaner emissions than the original equipment" itself; and

"Whereas car collectors typically use their vehicles only on an occasional basis, during four to five months of the year;

"Therefore, be it resolved that the Ontario Legislature support Ontarians who collect and restore old vehicles by amending the appropriate laws and regulations"—like the Drive Clean act—"to ensure vehicles over 20 years old and exempt from Drive Clean testing shall also be exempt from additional emissions requirements enforced by the Ministry of the Environment and governing the installation of newer engines into old cars."

I'm pleased to sign and support this on behalf of my constituents Frank Agueci, Rob McJannett, Rob Purdey and Peter Barber, all collectors of vintage cars.

ELECTRICITY GENERATION

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I have a petition here that was given to me by Jeff Mole, who is a community power consultant for Trillium Energy Alliance. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario"—
Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I heard that, Mr. Bradley.

"Whereas the Ontario Electricity System Operator is poised to procure electricity generation valued at hundreds of billions of dollars in the coming months and years; and

"Whereas community enterprises for electricity generation are democratically controlled legal entities established for the purpose of mobilizing communities and financial resources to consider local electricity generation opportunities with a view to providing benefits to the community and Ontario as a whole; and

"Whereas the commercialization of our natural resources, grid capacity and power purchase capacity can impair Ontarians' ability to mitigate the impacts of clean energy products; and

"Whereas community enterprises provide for local control over environmental assessment processes; and

"Whereas community enterprises can develop sensible proposals and become self-sustaining without the need for more government or government subsidies by generating and selling electricity on a not-for-profit basis; and

"Whereas the proposed renewable energy on crown land policy may encourage and prioritize community economic benefits"—
Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: We're having a lot of fun, eh?—"from water power development and other clean energy projects;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario support a community energy act to help facilitate

the mobilization of communities and financial resources for the purposes of developing community enterprises for electricity generation."

This petition comes from the St. Catharines area.

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GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I have a petition that reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the price of gas is reaching historic price levels and is expected to increase another 15% in the near future, yet oil prices are dropping;"—imagine that—"and

"Whereas the real reason for the high price of gas is gas companies are putting pressure to allow for the pipeline from Alberta to Texas; and

"Whereas the" McGuinty-Wynne "government has done nothing to protect consumers from high gas prices; and

"Whereas the high and unstable gas prices across Ontario have caused confusion and unfair hardship to Ontario's drivers while also impacting the Ontario economy in key sectors such as tourism and transportation; and

"Whereas the high price of gas has a detrimental impact on all aspects of our already troubled economy and substantially increases the price of delivered commodities, adding further burden to Ontario consumers;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and urge the Premier to take action to protect consumers from the burden of high gas prices in Ontario."

I affix my signature in full support.

GREENWATER PARK

Mr. John Vanthof: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the present government of Ontario should reverse the closure of Greenwater provincial park in Cochrane, Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario reverse the closure of Greenwater provincial park, to allow the park to remain fully operational and open enabling people from all over to enjoy camping and visiting on its grounds as of the spring of 2013."

I fully agree with this petition and add my signature.

ONTARIO HEALTH INSURANCE PLAN

Mr. Ted Arnott: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and it reads as follows:

"Whereas the McGuinty government has announced plans to change a number of Ontario health insurance plan (OHIP) services; and

"Whereas these changes are the result of a provincial debt crisis created by nine years of out-of-control government spending; and

"Whereas these changes will affect the ophthalmology, cardiology, and radiology services that are currently crucial to many Ontarians' quality of life;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty government release its patient health impact study on the recently announced Ontario health insurance plan changes or, if such a study has not been conducted, that one is immediately undertaken and made public."

It's signed by a number of my constituents in Wellington-Halton Hills.

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas residents of Ontario want a moratorium on all further industrial wind turbine development until an independent third party health and environmental study has been completed; and

"Whereas people in Ontario living within close proximity to industrial wind turbines have reported negative health effects, we need to study the physical, social, economic and environmental impacts of industrial wind turbines; and the Auditor General confirmed wind farms were created in haste and with no planning;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ontario government place a moratorium on the approval of any wind energy projects and a moratorium on the construction of industrial wind projects until further studies of the potential adverse health effects of industrial wind turbines, their effect on the environment, the potential devaluation of residential property are completed; and that any industrial wind projects not currently connected to the grid be cancelled."

I agree with this petition and I will affix my name to it.

PROVINCIAL PARKS

Ms. Sarah Campbell: I have a petition here from the Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association, NOMA, which reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ministry of Natural Resources has announced the end of overnight camping in 10 provincial parks in northern Ontario (Caliper Lake, Fushimi Lake, Greenwater, Ivanhoe Lake, Mississagi, Obatanga, Rene Brunelle, Springwater, The Shoals, and Tidewater); and

"Whereas the decision will result in job losses for northern Ontarians and negatively impact tourism and northern Ontario's way of life; and

"Whereas local stakeholders and municipalities have not been consulted on these closures and have been

denied the opportunity to make these parks more sustainable;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To immediately suspend plans to cancel overnight camping at the 10 provincial parks named above; and

"To consult with local municipalities, stakeholders and regional economic development organizations regarding the long-term viability of preserving northern Ontario's ... parks."

I support this and will give this—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington.

ONTARIO COLLEGE OF TRADES

Mr. Randy Hillier: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the government of Ontario's newly created Ontario College of Trades is planning to hit hard-working tradespeople with membership fees that, if the college has its way, will add up to \$84 million a year; and

"Whereas the Ontario College of Trades has no clear benefit and no accountability as tradespeople already pay for licences and countless other fees to government; and

"Whereas Ontario has struggled for years to attract people to skilled trades and the planned tax grab will kill jobs, and drive people out of trades;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To stop the job-killing trades tax and shut down the Ontario College of Trades immediately."

I agree with this petition and I affix my name to it.

WORKPLACE INSURANCE

Mr. Jeff Yurek: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the WSIB has mandated that effective January 1, 2013, all independent contractors and small business owners operating in the construction industry must have WSIB coverage;

"Whereas many of these business owners have their own private workplace insurance that in most cases is more affordable, more efficient and provides more extensive coverage;

"Whereas mandatory WSIB premiums add significant costs to small businesses and adversely affects their growth prospects and in some case their solvency;

"Whereas the government provided minimum notice about the change to businesses with WSIB sending out an official letter dated November 25, 2012;

"Whereas at a time when Ontario is facing a jobs crisis with 600,000 people unemployed, the government and its agencies should not be discouraging private sector job creation and growth by levying additional, unnecessary costs;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To direct the Minister of Labour to issue an order in council eliminating the requirement that mandates compulsory WSIB coverage on all independent contractors and small business owners in the construction industry."

I agree with this petition. I affix my signature.

ELECTRICITY GENERATION

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I've got a petition signed by people from all over Ontario, including people from Oakville. It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario Electricity System Operator is poised to procure electricity generation valued at hundreds of billions of dollars in the coming months and years; and

"Whereas community enterprises for electricity generation are democratically controlled legal entities established for the purpose of mobilizing communities and financial resources to consider local electricity generation opportunities with a view to providing benefits to the community and Ontario as a whole; and

"Whereas the commercialization of our natural resources, grid capacity and power purchase capacity can impair Ontarians' ability to mitigate the impacts of clean energy products; and

"Whereas community enterprises provide for local control over environmental assessment processes; and

"Whereas community enterprises can develop sensible proposals and become self-sustaining without the need for more government or government subsidies by generating and selling electricity on a not-for-profit basis; and

"Whereas the proposed renewable energy on crown land policy may encourage and prioritize community economic benefits from water power development and other clean energy projects;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario support a community energy act to help facilitate the mobilization of communities and financial resources for the purposes of developing community enterprises for electricity generation."

I support this petition.

ONTARIO COLLEGE OF TRADES

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the government of Ontario's newly created Ontario College of Trades is planning to hit hard-working tradespeople with membership fees that, if the college has its way, will add up to \$84 million a year; and

"Whereas the Ontario College of Trades has no clear benefit and no accountability as tradespeople already pay for licences and countless other fees to government; and

"Whereas Ontario has struggled for years to attract people to skilled trades and the planned tax grab will kill jobs, and drive people out of trades;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To stop the job-killing trades tax and shut down the Ontario College of Trades immediately."

Thank you.

ONTARIO COLLEGE OF TRADES

Mr. Jim McDonell: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario's tradespeople are subject to stifling regulation and are compelled to pay membership fees to the unaccountable College of Trades; and

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"Whereas these fees are a tax grab that drives down the wages of skilled tradespeople; and

"Whereas Ontario desperately needs a plan to solve our critical shortage of skilled tradespeople by encouraging our youth to enter the trades and attracting new tradespeople; and

"Whereas the latest policies from the McGuinty government"—Wynne government—"only aggravate the looming skilled trades shortage in Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To immediately disband the College of Trades, cease imposing needless membership fees and enact policies to attract young Ontarians into the skilled trades."

PENSION PLANS

Mr. Ted Arnott: I have a petition that was intended for the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and was sent to me by the members of OPT at Maplehurst Correctional Complex. Since we're almost out of time, I'll just say that the basic message that they've asked us to do is to keep our hands off their pension.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GREAT LAKES PROTECTION ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR LA PROTECTION DES GRANDS LACS

Mr. Bradley moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 6, An Act to protect and restore the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin / Projet de loi 6, Loi visant la protection et le rétablissement du bassin des Grands Lacs et du fleuve Saint-Laurent.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Minister.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will be sharing my time with the member for Ottawa-Orléans.

It's an honour for me to rise in the Legislature today to begin second reading of the new Ontario government's proposed Great Lakes Protection Act. I'll be sharing my time, as I indicated, with my parliamentary assistant, Phil McNeely, the member for Ottawa-Orléans, whom I want to thank for all his work in helping bring forward this bill.

The Great Lakes, I think we would agree, are a true global treasure, containing nearly 20% of the earth's fresh surface water. That's actually an astounding figure. When you think of the entire earth and all the fresh water that's there, we have access to 20%.

The lakes support a diverse array of plants and animals with rich ecosystems that are unique in the world. They provide us with water to drink and with food to eat. Their beautiful waters, beaches, and campgrounds attract residents and visitors from outside our province to their shores.

Many of the members of this Legislature represent constituencies that either abut the Great Lakes or abut tributaries which go into the Great Lakes. I know that all members of the Legislature are interested in this particular subject and this particular legislation, but some even more so because of the direct impact on their constituencies. I see the member for Leamington here today, who has addressed an issue that occurred near his constituency; he and I worked together on it and the matter was ultimately resolved, but I know he has a great interest, as so many do. The member for Oshawa, who's here today, would have a great interest; any one of us would.

They provide, as well, spiritual sustenance to First Nations peoples and others who enjoy the outdoors and connecting with nature. Further, the basin is really a historic location where Métis identity emerged in Ontario.

The lakes power our homes and factories. They irrigate our farms. They help transport our goods to markets throughout North America and abroad. I can tell you again, as one of those individuals who resides in a community that's on the Great Lakes, as the Speaker does—by the way, I want to mention that one of the projects that we are involved in cleaning up some historic problems in the Great Lakes involves Hamilton Harbour. I know that the member for Hamilton East-Stoney Creek is very supportive of seeing the investment by the provincial government of \$46 million, and by the federal government and by the local community.

The Great Lakes are vital to the quality of life and prosperity of the people of Ontario. We've already done much to protect the Great Lakes, and water quality has improved over the past few decades. Discharges of pollutants such as PCBs and mercury have been significantly reduced. Smaller inland lakes within the basin are recovering from the impacts of acid rain, but this great treasure is still at risk.

There are strong indications that Lake Ontario, Lake Erie and Lake Huron are in fact in decline. Scientists are warning us that the Great Lakes are at what they refer to

as a tipping point. Climate change, an increasing population, growing demand for water, more stormwater and sewage going into the lakes, and rising levels of nuisance and toxic algae and pollutants are degrading the lakes.

Loss of natural habitat such as wetlands, and the influx of invasive species, such as zebra and quagga mussels and the round goby, are causing declines in the population of fish and other species native to the Great Lakes and threatening the health of our entire ecosystems.

I should mention here that when we talk about the fish, there are commercial fishers, as we call them now, and there are people who are sport fishers. There's a lot of great fish to enjoy from the lakes. Those of us who are close to Lake Erie recognize that the Lake Erie perch are particularly popular. You can try to get into a restaurant—some of the places along Lake Erie—and it's mighty hard to get in, because the locals and people who come from afar are enjoying the fish on that occasion. They are at risk as we see these invasive species coming in. I know both the sports fisher-persons and those men and women who are involved in commercial fishing want to ensure that this is preserved.

Concerns are increasing over newer chemicals, such as flame retardants, pesticides and pharmaceuticals from urban, industrial and agricultural sources. As stewards of this precious resource, it is our duty to protect the Great Lakes and ensure that they remain drinkable, swimmable and fishable for today and, indeed, for generations to come.

Ontario has been hard at work with many partners over the last 40 years—and I say over the last 40 years—to protect the Great Lakes. We've had some notable successes. Highly polluted hot spots have been cleaned up in Collingwood Harbour, and Severn Sound on Georgian Bay, and Wheatley Harbour on Lake Erie. Levels of toxic chemicals which were harming fish and wildlife have been reduced. Populations of bald eagles, lake trout and other species are rebounding after years in decline.

We are fortunate in Ontario to have leading legislation that covers specific areas, such as protecting drinking water and promoting water innovation, conservation and sustainability, but new challenges are overwhelming the old solutions. The health of the Great Lakes requires a targeted approach and renewed commitment to protecting these waters.

The proposed Great Lakes Protection Act is a key element of our vision for sustaining, restoring and protecting Lakes Superior, Huron, Erie and Ontario, their connecting rivers, the St. Lawrence River, the Ottawa River, surrounding watersheds and groundwater. And I'm sure our American friends would apply that to Lake Michigan as well.

The people of Ontario understand the need for, and importance of, collective action to find solutions to the challenges that are facing the Great Lakes. This was made clear last year when I listened to municipal leaders, First Nations and Métis leadership, and community representatives, environmental groups, representatives

from agriculture, industry and the tourism sectors and scientists.

Over the last summer, ministry staff also travelled around Ontario, to Thunder Bay, Windsor, Cambridge, Guelph, Goderich and Little Current, to get further input on what we should do to safeguard the Great Lakes. Ministry staff met with stakeholders and with First Nations and Métis communities and leadership to gain their perspective and their advice.

When we introduced the legislation last year, we heard people speak clearly about the need for legislation to protect the Great Lakes. I want to thank all the people from across Ontario, from a wide range of sectors, who have commented and who have taken part in the public engagement and consultation process. We look forward to continuing to work with all interested parties as this bill moves forward.

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I want to say that the discussions we had, the dialogue we had, was extremely valuable to me as the minister and to our ministry staff. There were different perspectives depending on where you were, but there was a commonality of interest in protecting the Great Lakes.

My ministry will consider all comments received on the previous proposed Great Lakes Protection Act, 2012, and on Ontario's Great Lakes Strategy, alongside all comments received on the Great Lakes Protection Act, 2013, as the proposed act moves forward through the legislative process.

The proposed act builds on engagement with a wide variety of Great Lakes experts, First Nations and Métis communities and Great Lakes stakeholders, and there are many of those around the province. The bill builds on this engagement as well as on the feedback received since the release of Ontario's Draft Great Lakes Strategy and introduction of the predecessor to this legislation, Bill 100, in June 2012.

The Great Lakes Guardian Community Fund was launched last year to an overwhelming response from grassroots groups looking to take action to protect and restore their corner of the Great Lakes. The fund is now helping 80 different communities and environmental organizations, First Nations and Métis communities or other organizations tackle small projects to improve the quality of the Great Lakes.

For example, the Friends of Medway Creek and the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority were awarded a grant to plant native trees and shrubs on the creek bank to help reduce erosion and improve water quality and fish habitat in Medway Creek, which ultimately flows into the Great Lakes. If I'm not wrong, and I could be corrected, I think it's Jeff Yurek's—I know I'm not supposed to use names, but his particular constituency, because I spoke to a teacher who was involved with the students at that time who lived close to Jeff, and I know Jeff has a strong concern about and affinity for the Great Lakes.

Another small grant is helping Ontario streams protect and restore Atlantic salmon on the Credit and Humber

River watersheds by improving access to spawning habitats, stocking rivers with salmon and promoting community stewardship. And the 9th Pickering Scouts are using their grant to remove garbage from streams and marshes, educating youth on the value and need for preserving Ontario watersheds. People know what they would like to fix on the shorelines and stream banks of their own hometowns.

It is also important to remember that the Great Lakes are a resource shared between the people and communities of Ontario as well as our neighbours in the United States. Again, I was struck when I met, particularly in Thunder Bay, with some of the people from environmental and natural organizations up there, who worked hand in hand with their American friends and colleagues, who both had an affinity for the Great Lakes and the desire to always improve and protect those Great Lakes. So it was people to people in that case, just as we have governments to governments, national governments and then the state and provincial governments and organizations. They're people to people in the case that I'm recalling here at this time.

Our US partners are already moving ahead through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, which has seen an investment of \$1 billion over the past three years to address key issues on the Great Lakes. I think they have recognized they've had some major challenges. The national government in the United States has contributed hundreds of millions of dollars to this, and we're delighted to see it because we also benefit from the impact of those kinds of investments and that kind of care and concern. We need to do our part and continue to be good stewards of this shared resource.

If passed by this Legislature, the proposed Great Lakes Protection Act would provide a comprehensive suite of tools to address the combined stresses on the Great Lakes at a regional level. These tools would strengthen our collective efforts to restore and protect wetlands, beaches and shorelines, as well as natural habitats and ecosystems. The proposed act would engage partners and enable action.

If passed, the proposed Great Lakes Protection Act would create a forum for collaboration among Great Lakes partners where priorities for the lakes would be identified and initiatives would be discussed.

The Great Lakes Guardians' Council would include provincial ministers with responsibilities related to the lakes, along with municipal representatives, First Nations and Métis community representatives and others. Other partners could include environmental groups, industry, farmers, recreation and tourism sectors and the science community. During discussions with stakeholders and aboriginal peoples, we heard that working together is essential to making the most progress with the available resources that we have at this time. To be clear, the council is not a new agency, but a forum for coordination.

The proposed act would provide the Minister of the Environment, in consultation with other Great Lakes

ministers, the authority to set specific or general targets at the local, coastal or watershed scale. The ability to set targets would help all partners work toward common outcomes and help Ontario build on its efforts to manage the cumulative impacts of activities around the Great Lakes basin. These targets would be based on the best available science, and be decided upon through collaboration and consultation. Potential targets that people have suggested to us include keeping beaches clean and open for people to enjoy, lowering phosphorus levels to combat algae, and reducing harmful pollutants.

The proposed act would allow for phased, targeted action by developing geographically focused initiatives, which would allow for specific approaches to address the unique issues facing priority areas around the lakes.

Shorelines, where water meets land, are particularly vulnerable parts of the ecosystem. Natural shorelines and coastal wetlands are essential for the health of the Great Lakes, a lesson we have learned well from our continuing work with the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan. I want to say how successful that's been, and I want to commend all of those who have been part of that exercise: people in the area, specifically, and others who have contributed. That's been highly successful, because we know—particularly for those who enjoy it for recreational purposes—Lake Simcoe is a great asset to this province. Those who fish, both in winter and in summer, enjoy it very much. The locals certainly contributed to this, but so many people were part of that collaboration.

So the proposed act, then, would also provide additional tools to support implementation of interjurisdictional agreements, such as a new Canada-Ontario agreement on the Great Lakes. It would also enshrine Ontario's Great Lakes Strategy in law as a living document that is reviewed every six years to coordinate action and advance Great Lakes priorities.

Ontario's Great Lakes Strategy was finalized in December 2012. Ontario's Great Lakes Strategy is our road map for action for protecting and restoring the ecological health of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence basin through six Great Lakes goals, which are consistent with the purpose of the proposed act. These are: engaging and empowering communities; protecting water for human and ecological health; improving wetlands, beaches, shorelines and coastal areas; protecting habitats and species; enhancing understanding and adaptation; and ensuring environmentally sustainable economic opportunities and innovation.

Achieving healthy Great Lakes will require efforts from all of us, but given their importance to our economy and quality of life, investment in the Great Lakes makes sense. My parliamentary assistant will be speaking to this point in more detail shortly. For example, investing in actions to prevent high levels of nutrients from entering the Great Lakes can be expected to yield a return of \$2 for every dollar invested.

Ontario, I should say—and I think all members of the Legislature can take satisfaction in this—has a 40-year history of actions on protecting and restoring the Great

Lakes. This is the necessary next step in a series of actions taken by many Ontario governments.

I want to highlight the important work of both opposition parties when they formed the government of this province. A Conservative government signed the first Canada-Ontario agreement on the Great Lakes back in 1971, with a focus on controlling phosphorus and sewage treatment in the lower Great Lakes.

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As environment minister in 1985, I had the pleasure of introducing the Municipal-Industrial Strategy for Abatement, called MISA, which targeted direct discharges into our waterways.

Under the NDP government, Collingwood Harbour was the first area of concern in Canada or the US to be declared restored and delisted.

This commitment from all parties represented in this Legislature highlights a central truth about the Great Lakes: No matter where we sit in this House, no matter where we live in this province, we all understand the importance of this immense freshwater resource.

We're all in this together. We all benefit from healthy Great Lakes. Clean water, resilient ecosystems and a strong Great Lakes economic base will help us continue to build an Ontario that is one of the best places in the world to live, work and play.

We all know we must do the right thing for future generations of Ontarians and work together to leave the lakes in better condition than we found them. I know from their actions that all parties here have a strong belief in the protection and restoration of the Great Lakes. This proposed act is the next logical step. It's a continuation of the work that all parties have taken on. So today I encourage all members of the House to continue that commitment to the Great Lakes and join with vast numbers of passionate and committed individuals.

I can recall, in my previous time as Minister of the Environment from 1985 to 1990, and more latterly in the last couple of years or close to two years, the level of commitment that has come from individuals within legislative bodies.

I had the opportunity to meet with American legislators both at the national level and at the state level, particularly back when we were dealing with the issue of acid rain. Those who represent the more inland lakes would recognize the importance of dealing with the issue of acid rain. It took a lot of determination, and it took coordination between the two countries. Our national government of the day worked with the provincial government of the day. Tom McMillan was the minister at that particular time, in the government of Prime Minister Mulroney. I had the opportunity to work with him, and Premier Peterson with Prime Minister Mulroney, at that particular time.

Acid rain was having a devastating effect. Again, those who represent areas where fishing and the importance of trees—for instance, sap coming out of the trees, maple syrup and so on—recognized that we were being impacted drastically by acid rain, which is sulphur

dioxide coming down in liquid form. Some of our lakes were actually dying at that time.

One of our allies, interestingly enough, were our American friends, who come north in the summer particularly, and sometimes in the winter, to enjoy what we have to offer in places such as Muskoka, which is well known. Many of them have their cottages there or along Lake Erie and many places in the province. They in turn were putting pressure on their people back in the United States to come together to deal with this issue of acid rain.

Pretty drastic action was taken. There were those who were doubters at that time, who said, "Well, you know, there's not the scientific evidence, there's not the technical ability and there's not the money to deal with this issue." We found again that, working together, we were able to do so. There were some pretty onerous regulations put on the major emitters of sulphur dioxide at that time, and initially they were not amused by it. But I'm pleased to say that they came around, and many of those who actually had to make the changes contemplated and required in those regulations were later bragging it up for the work they had done, and they are to be commended for that.

I see similar things happening today, and I see a grand coalition of members of this Legislature for once—on one issue, at least—and of people across this province. I urge all of you who are members of this House to give it careful consideration. We will appreciate your input. But let us all support the proposed legislation and be true guardians of this priceless legacy, our Great Lakes. Future generations will thank us.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you, Minister. The parliamentary assistant, the member from Ottawa-Orléans.

Mr. Phil McNeely: Today is anti-bullying day, of course, and I'm wearing pink. I tried to find some clothing that had a little bit of pink in it.

I'm very pleased today to speak on this bill. It's an honour for me to have this opportunity to join the environment minister, Jim Bradley, in supporting the new Ontario government's proposed Great Lakes Protection Act.

As you've just heard from the minister, the proposed act would, if passed, help ensure that our treasured Great Lakes remain drinkable, swimmable and fishable. The proposed act would cover the entire Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River basin, including the Ottawa River.

I grew up on a farm on the Ottawa River. I was surprised, when this legislation came up, that it does include the full watershed of the Ottawa River, which includes La Verendrye park, I believe, right up to Renfrew and further up. There's great fishing up in La Verendrye park. That area drains into the Ottawa River and is part of this act.

The health of these waters ultimately affects the overall health and resilience of our Great Lakes, as we all share the benefits they provide.

Minister Bradley has spoken about the need for the proposed Great Lakes Protection Act. He has listened to people all around the province—from municipalities, First Nations, Métis leaders, to our scientists, our environmental groups, to representatives from the agricultural sector and other industries, and recreational groups, as well as people in many different communities. We will continue to engage, consult and listen as we move forward with this important work.

Minister Bradley spoke of the importance of working with all of our partners in a collaborative, co-operative way to ensure the great legacy the Great Lakes provides is protected and sustained for all to enjoy. In a world of dwindling water resources, we share in the responsibility to respect and protect and restore this global treasure. As the minister said, nearly 20% of the fresh surface water of the planet is in our Great Lakes. I'd like to take the time today to discuss the importance of the proposed act in relation to the many ways the Great Lakes are essential to the well-being of Ontario families.

The Great Lakes are truly the waters of life to us in Ontario, providing drinking water to more than 80% of our population. In fact, close to 98% of our population lives in the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River basin. That's amazing—98%. At the same time, the lakes are the great engines that power our strength and success. The Great Lakes basin is the location of almost 40% of the country's entire economic activity. From steel and cement manufacturing to car parts and precision ball bearings, Ontario manufacturers depend on the high quality of the Great Lakes waters.

Around 95% of Ontario's agricultural land is in the Great Lakes basin. The land of the Great Lakes basin supports our farms and farmers and our thriving agricultural and food industry, helping to grow our crops and process food products. The agri-industry contributes \$33 billion a year to Ontario's gross domestic product and provides jobs for 700,000 people. Clean and reliable Great Lakes water is also essential for many aspects of the agri-food sector, including food and beverage processing, the second-largest manufacturing employer in Ontario. There are around 3,000 food-processing firms in the province, generating close to 100,000 jobs and contributing \$10 billion to Ontario's gross domestic product.

Shipping through the Great Lakes also helps generate wealth, creates employment and supports other industries with raw materials and products shipped to and from markets throughout Ontario, Canada and around the world. This shipping corridor is vital to heavy industries located on Ontario waterways, which in turn feed the province's manufacturing base and our broader economy. The shipping industry itself contributes \$200 million in provincial gross domestic product annually, but it generates more wealth and employment by supporting other industrial activities in Ontario.

In 2007, 43 million metric tonnes of cargo—mostly grain, iron ore, coal, steel and other bulk commodities—with a value of over \$7 billion, moved through the Great

Lakes-St. Lawrence Seaway. This important transportation artery links the Great Lakes region to producers and consumers around the world.

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Hydroelectric power from the Great Lakes has fuelled Ontario's economic growth since the beginning of the 20th century. The Great Lakes waters keep the lights on across Ontario, helping to generate more than 80% of our electricity.

Of course, our fisheries, tourism and recreation all depend on the health of the Great Lakes and their ecosystems.

Water is the heart and soul of Ontario's tourism industry, from Niagara Falls to the Thousand Islands, from Wasaga Beach to the rocky shores of Lake Superior. Great Lakes beaches, wetlands, marinas and waterfronts attract residents and tourists from around the world. People are drawn to the lakes for swimming, fishing, boating, hiking, birdwatching, camping, picnicking, spending time at the cottage and simply connecting with nature and waiting for a perfect sunset. In 2010, Ontario had more than 73 million tourist visits in the Great Lakes region, injecting \$12.3 billion into our economy.

Beginning with the first aboriginal peoples, fishing has always played an important role in Ontario's heritage and culture. The commercial fishery on the Great Lakes contributes \$234 million to the province's economy every year. Recreational fishing has an even greater economic impact. I was surprised 15 years ago when I caught about a 10-pound trout in sight of the CN Tower, right out in this Great Lake.

Lake Superior yields trophy-size brook trout. Georgian Bay on Lake Huron and Long Point Bay on Lake Erie offer superb bass fishing. Lake Erie and the Bay of Quinte on Lake Ontario produce big walleye. Lake Huron and Lake Ontario offer spectacular trophy salmon fishing. More than one million people a year go fishing in Ontario.

I have to say that as a young person on that farm along the Ottawa River, the spring always meant that the barbottes were out, and we could catch a good feed of fish every day that way. My mother knew how to cook—we called them mud pout or barbottes. "Barbotte" was the French word. They were an excellent eating fish from the Ottawa River.

Many of those people are fishing on the Great Lakes and their tributaries. Recreational fishers in the Great Lakes contribute more than \$600 million to Ontario's economy each year.

As these examples illustrate, the Great Lakes contribute billions of dollars to Ontario's economy and create jobs for the people of Ontario in many different ways and in many different sectors. From the earliest days of our province, they have been the strong foundation of our growth and success. They provide Ontario with a significant economic advantage and a competitive edge. We need to ensure that they continue to provide a strong and stable foundation for future generations.

A recent Ontario study has shown that we can expect real economic returns when we invest in actions that keep the Great Lakes healthy and sustainable. The study shows, for example, that we can expect an economic return of up to \$2 for every dollar invested in green infrastructure and other actions to prevent high levels of nutrients from entering the lakes. When it comes to protecting wetlands around the lakes, we can expect an economic return of up to \$35 for every dollar invested.

The study found that the most cost-effective investment in the Great Lakes is in preventing problems before they happen. For example, if we invest in preventing Asian carp from entering the Great Lakes, the short- and long-term economic benefits heavily outweigh the costs of dealing with the fallout from such an invasion.

As a member of the National Caucus of Environmental Legislators, I've been to Chicago twice for conferences, and also Washington one time, and this issue is always at the top of the list, but the solutions are still waiting.

This is consistent with findings of similar studies in the United States conducted by the Brookings Institution.

The study also shows that we can expect significant economic return—up to \$2 for every dollar invested in green infrastructure. Green infrastructure or landscape-based practices offer alternative ways to process and reuse rain and stormwater. Not only does this prevent excess nutrients from going into the lakes and creating algae problems, it also saves money, reducing infrastructure costs while providing greener spaces and cleaner air.

We are listening to what the experts are telling us, both about the economic benefits of investing in Great Lakes protection efforts and about the cumulative pressures that are affecting the health and resiliency of the Great Lakes today.

There are more challenges on the horizon. Ontario's future population growth is expected to be concentrated around the Great Lakes. With an annual growth rate of 6%, ours is the fastest-growing population around the Great Lakes region. While this growth can bring economic benefits, it can also add more stress to the ecosystem. More people settling around the lakes brings a demand for more water and increases the possibility of more storm water carrying phosphorus and contaminants into the Great Lakes.

Our changing climate is likely to make these problems worse and put even greater demands on our water and waste water infrastructure. Growth that is not properly managed can lead to the loss of important habitats, such as wetlands and beaches. The loss of fish and wildlife habitats not only affects the overall ecosystem health, it can cost us commercial and sport-fishing opportunities, and other opportunities for health, recreation and tourism.

The populations of some Great Lakes species have declined to the point where they are now at risk. The threat of invasive species such as Asian carp could devastate our ecosystems and fisheries. Our scientists are

seeing the effects of climate change on the Great Lakes. Less ice cover, more open water, more evaporation, bigger storms, changing water levels and high summer water temperatures pose risks for Great Lakes communities and ecosystems. Issues such as chemicals of emerging concern, changing water levels and algae are all coming to the forefront.

On Lake Erie, the fall of 2011 saw record levels of potentially toxic blue-green algae. Other parts of the lakes, such as the Bay of Quinte, are also experiencing similar problems. Some of Ontario's most beautiful Great Lakes beaches are not only affected by excess algae, but also excessive bacteria levels, particularly after heavy rains.

Good science, research and monitoring partnerships will also help support our Great Lakes work by providing the knowledge and data to help identify issues, set priorities, establish Great Lakes targets and guide effective restoration and protection initiatives.

We've been taking action in tangible ways and the proposed act builds on the existing work that has been going on for many years. In communities across Ontario, we have worked with local groups, industries and other partners to restore degraded areas, tackle shoreline problems, clean up priority watersheds and reduce harmful pollutants. We know the Great Lakes are important to the people of Ontario and that communities across this province are ready to work with us to tackle their Great Lakes priorities.

What we need now are the tools that the proposed act would provide. We need to bring together many different partners to take the next necessary steps to build on good work that is taking place around the province. The challenges we are facing can and must be addressed. Science is providing us a clear picture of the needs of the Great Lakes. None of the challenges we are facing offer up simple solutions but we have seen good progress made and we intend to build on that progress through on-the-ground efforts such as a Great Lakes Guardian Community Fund. We have seen people of all ages and backgrounds step forward to take action in their corner of the Great Lakes. This fund is providing real opportunities for grassroots action and involvement.

We're also continuing to work with our partners at the federal level as we work to negotiate a new Canada-Ontario agreement on the Great Lakes. Important partnerships are happening at the municipal level as communities continue their great work on delivering on remedial action plans for areas of concern, improving their waste water and storm water management, conserving water and taking care of beaches around the Great Lakes.

What we need now are the tools the proposed act would provide. We need to bring together many different partners to take the next steps to build on the good work that is taking place around the provinces. The challenge we are facing can and must be addressed.

Together, as partners who share this precious legacy, we can move forward on actions that will ensure clean,

healthy and resilient Great Lakes. The province's Great Lakes initiative aims to arm Ontario, top to bottom, with new tools and resources to support a renewed effort to restore and protect the Great Lakes. The proposed Great Lakes Protection Act, if passed, would be a key part of Ontario's strategy to ensure our lakes stay drinkable, swimmable and fishable. It would provide the government with new tools to set targets and take cleanup actions where they are needed most. It would establish a council to allow provincial Great Lakes priorities and funding to bring key partners and leaders together.

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It is time for renewed action to restore and protect the Great Lakes, to keep them a ready storehouse of vital resources for our future. I encourage all members of the House to support the vision of a healthy Great Lakes for a stronger Ontario and to support the proposed Great Lakes Protection Act.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? The member for Kitchener-Conestoga.

Mr. Michael Harris: Okay. Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to take this opportunity to respond to the proposed Great Lakes Protection Act.

I thank the minister for his remarks, and the member previous, Ottawa-Orléans. I will tell the viewers at home they can take their sunglasses off. I, too, am wearing pink today in support of anti-bullying. Mr. McNeely clearly has a much brighter shirt than I, but I appreciate him for supporting anti-bullying.

As he had just mentioned, he attended a conference just recently on the Great Lakes in Chicago, and I too had the opportunity to attend that conference. I enjoyed the time that we had, as legislators, talking about the issues that are important to Great Lakes states and Great Lakes provinces, so thank you for that.

I've spoken a number of times in this House about how the Liberal government tends to rush its bills through the Legislature with little forethought or consultation. I'm sure many of you on this side have spoken about the same things.

Interjection: You're doing a comment, Mike.

Mr. Michael Harris: Oh, okay.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: It's okay. Just keep going.

Mr. Michael Harris: I've got plenty more to say eventually on this, as I'm sure we'll get to in the next round of discussion. And thank you, Speaker, for reminding me I've just got two minutes. I'll be up for an hour, and we'll hear plenty more of this to come. I look forward to communicating our stance and some of the concerns that we have with this piece of legislation, as I get that opportunity to speak for an hour on this proposed piece of legislation.

I did want to get that out of the way first, that I had an opportunity to spend some time with Mr. McNeely, talking about the Great Lakes and some of the items that are of concern to it. Thanks, obviously, to the minister for allowing me that first two minutes. I'll look forward to him being here as he listens intently to my one hour on the issue.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Mantha: I'm happy to see the minister re-introduce this bill, and I look forward to having a full complement of time speaking to it, because it is a very big issue for the residents and a lot of the constituents that I have in Algoma-Manitoulin, and in particular along Manitoulin Island, along the North Shore. A lot of them have some grave concerns in regard to certain aspects of the inaction, or no concrete plan, as far as what is happening, particularly with the water levels. How it's affecting them with their households is really of concern to me.

I just wanted to read a particular invitation from the meetings. I look forward to hearing the minister elaborate a little bit more on the representative and interest groups from municipalities, and that municipalities and some of the stakeholders will be invited.

Under the IJC report that had come out over the course of last summer, I would really, in particular, extend a big invitation, or suggest to the minister that he really look at the First Nations from the area of Manitoulin Island and make sure that they're included—and also particularly the women that are there. The First Nation ladies have a particular interest when it comes to the protection of our waters. Their input, to be honest with you, was completely ignored during the time of the IJC report.

I look forward to having these discussions in regard to not limiting it just to what is in this act but also opening it up to a bigger problem, which is the levels that are going on with our water and how those levels are having a drastic impact not only on the economy but on the entire biodiversity of our Great Lakes.

I'm looking forward to having further debate about this, and I thank you for bringing this again.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I'm delighted to join the debate. I want to compliment the member from Ottawa-Orléans and of course the minister for their comments and bringing forward this bill.

In what seems like a previous lifetime now as Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, I was privileged to be part of a couple of consultations with our ag food community with respect to water and water management. It's clear, particularly in an era where we're seeing climate change having such a dramatic impact on agricultural economies, for us to focus yet anew on the preciousness of water and the importance of stewarding the sources of water that we have.

There's a group of scientists in the United States who self-describe themselves as "The doomers." There are 10 of them who inform us that the drought that hit the southern United States last year was the worst in, I think, 104 years, and they predict that it will be the wettest year of the next seven. So that sends a signal to us as to just how important water management, water conservation and the need to, as they say, be good stewards of our water is.

We are blessed indeed to have sustainable water sources here. There are many places I've travelled in the world, Mr. Speaker, where people go to war over water, and it is a resource that's even more precious than gold.

So I'm pleased the minister has brought this legislation back, and I look forward to ultimately having broad-based support across the House for the initiatives that he has carefully outlined in his bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'm proud to put my two cents in to the introductory speech brought on by the Minister of Environment, and I congratulate him on mentioning my riding; it is the best riding there is in Ontario, and I'm proud to be a strong part of it.

This bill—I'd like to get further discussion on it. I want to ensure that there's no duplication going on of rules and regulations we already have. There's no use to pile on more regulatory burden on any community or business or person when there's no need for it. So I'd like to have a further discussion to ensure that this act will take care of the regulatory burden that we don't want to compound it.

I'd also like to see great discussion on water levels. I travel to the St. Clair River from time to time, and I notice it's getting lower and lower and lower. We want to ensure that we do have the proper protections in place for our water sources as it is a vital part of life. A water a day is good for your soul, I always say.

We want to ensure, though, that we work and collaborate with one another and have proper consultation so that if we do come up with an act that is to protect the Great Lakes, there's no duplication involved and it's fair to all concerned.

Just before I sit down, a little bit of news here for the Legislature: My daughter placed first again at the St. Thomas Rotary Music Festival today. So it's two days in a row. She's a beautiful singer, nine years old—we hope to have her here singing O Canada someday for everybody.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The Minister of the Environment has two minutes to respond.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I must mention to the member for Elgin—Middlesex—London—offer congratulations from myself and I'm sure all members of the Legislature on his daughter's success. Obviously the daughter has inherited from her mother some great musical talent, and we appreciate that.

I want to assure my friend, the Conservative critic, that one doesn't have to take the full hour. Notice that, so that you can get on earlier, my parliamentary assistant and I took a little less time so that you would be in prime time, if we can put it that way. So don't feel that you necessarily have to take the entire hour.

I do appreciate your comment, both you and your colleague, about wanting a full canvass of the issues. That's why we have the debate; that's good. I'm looking forward to that, and the committee time that we'll spend

on this. We've had some great consultation taking place; I've really been impressed. The member for Algoma-Manitoulin mentioned First Nations individuals, and I must say that my discussions with them and dialogue we engaged in were very valuable. What you really find out is their great affinity and reverence for water—probably much greater than the general population's. I found it very, very helpful to have their input.

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I want to say to the Minister of Community and Social Services that I appreciate his comments as well. He also represents an area that, as I mentioned earlier, would receive an investment of \$46 million from the government of Ontario, matched by the government of Canada and matched by the local people in the Hamilton area. Hamilton harbour is an area of great concern and has been for some time. We have an example of three entities working together to improve the Great Lakes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Harris: Again, it's a pleasure to respond to the proposed Great Lakes Protection Act. As I stated back in the first two minutes, I have actually had an opportunity a number of times in this House to speak about how this Liberal government really tends to rush its bills through the Legislature with little forethought or consultation. In fact, I myself introduced, in my first opportunity as a private member to introduce a piece of legislation, the Transparency in Government Bills Act, during the last session, really as a way to stop this disturbing trend and protect taxpayers from bad government policy. Still, as I stand here right now, I have to admit that I'm a little surprised by just how quickly the Minister of the Environment has raced to begin debating this government's proposed Great Lakes Protection Act, or Bill 6.

I do appreciate, though, that ministry officials have contacted my office to set up a briefing to go over any changes that have been made to the bill. As you'll recall, Bill 100, the Great Lakes Protection Act, was introduced in the last session. But unfortunately, it was so good that the government decided to prorogue and kill that legislative agenda, and so we're back here with Bill 6 ready to go.

I will say, though, that it's unfortunate that that meeting is next week, and I didn't have the opportunity to meet with them prior to today to go over some of the changes from Bill 100 to Bill 6. Thankfully, though, I completed an extensive consultation on this particular piece of legislation the last time the government introduced it, as I was saying, last year. In fact, last year I met with aboriginal groups, conservation authorities, environmental organizations, farmers, home builders, industry representatives, local governments, businesses in the clean water sector and our Environmental Commissioner, Mr. Miller. I'm sure you've all had the opportunity to meet and dialogue with him. I have noted all their concerns and comments on this particular bill, which has suddenly become the government's first priority.

Now, as I would hope members of the government would remember, a throne speech is to outline the agenda or the priorities of the government. I feel it's a great opportunity to go back. I had an opportunity to speak to the throne speech just the other day, but I feel it's important to go back to that.

You know, I felt the day of the throne speech was truly a moment of truth for Ontario. The speech from the throne presented an opportunity for this government—what in fact is called the new government—to make the necessary and urgent decisions to put Ontario on the right track.

We of course all want a better Ontario. We had hoped to see reduced spending and a plan to create jobs. It would have been better for Ontario if the Premier used this as a time and opportunity to reverse the track that Ontario is on. Instead, however, she treated it as a time to entrench the Dalton McGuinty agenda that has led Ontario down a path of bigger deficits, more debt and more Ontarians without a good-paying job. You know, anyone who has ever been faced with a crisis or emergency will tell you that being cautious, being incremental will not save you and that the only way forward is to move quickly, confidently and boldly in a direction that you know is right. However, unfortunately, we did not hear that from the Premier during her remarks. In fact, I will say, though, that we did get to hear that the following day when our leader, Tim Hudak, and the Ontario PC Party rose to speak about our plan to end the overspending and grow the economy. I will just highlight quickly, for those who were here and those who may not have been here, some of those issues.

We talked about reforming our outdated labour laws—I know my colleague from Lanark will, in the coming weeks and months, be speaking about just how we're going to do that, and I thank him for his efforts on that file—lowering taxes to expand economic activity and get our economy driving again; establishing affordable energy as a cornerstone of economic growth; creating more skilled trades jobs by modernizing the apprenticeship system—today we heard our member from Simcoe talk about how we would go about doing that, including the abolishment of the College of Trades, which is simply no more than a tax on our hard-working tradespeople here in Ontario—and creating more job opportunities for our youth and graduates of our schools, colleges and universities, because we all know the best thing we can give our young people is an opportunity and a good job to provide a great base for their families.

Ontarians need to see a serious plan from their government that presents a clear and credible way to reduce the size and cost of government. Unfortunately, that was not addressed in the throne speech. I will say, though, that there was one gentleman who wasn't able to make it. He has since left the Legislature and has moved into the private sector. I would like to quote him because he admitted that the interest payments on the province's overall debt are in fact a ticking time bomb and that, clearly, they needed to reduce spending and tackle the

deficit. That was the Liberal Party's own former finance minister, Dwight Duncan, who said that: that it is a ticking, ticking time bomb.

Just getting back to the bill and the throne speech, we actually didn't even hear mention of the Great Lakes in the speech from the throne. That's interesting. What's more, there were no mentions of the environment, aside from two relatively brief and totally ambiguous statements. You would think that a government whose first order of business is to introduce a bill on the Great Lakes would mention it when setting out the government's agenda, or at least prioritize it the last time it was introduced. After being tabled in June last year, this bill sat for months until it was thrown out when the Liberals prorogued. I will remind Ontarians watching at home that that was a desperate, cynical move to shut down the finance committee's investigation into the Liberal government's politically motivated decision to cancel the Mississauga and Oakville gas plants simply to save a few Liberal seats.

Interjection: Right on Lake Ontario.

Mr. Michael Harris: Right on Lake Ontario, as one of my colleagues just mentioned.

When the kitchen got hot, when finally—as constituents come up to me each and every day, they say, "Continue to keep that government held to account. We want to know why, who and how much it has cost us as taxpayers to basically save Liberal seats in the last election." Again, a cynical move, a political move made by the campaign team which involved, obviously, the new Premier as co-chair of the campaign, in an attempt to save Liberal seats right before—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): On a point of order, the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: Speaker, can I just be sure that we're talking about Bill 6, the Great Lakes Protection Act? I'd ask the speaker to speak to the bill. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Yes, I would remind the member for Kitchener-Conestoga that it would be most appropriate if he would bring his comments back to making reference to Bill 6.

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Mr. Michael Harris: You know what? Bringing back those comments, when I outline about the power plants and the money that some say is up to \$1.3 billion, which is a heck of a lot of money—look what that money could have been used to do, when speaking about the environment and a variety of a lot of other things. I couldn't even imagine what \$1.3 billion would do to help protect and address the situation faced in the Great Lakes.

Just getting back to the fact that it seemed nowhere on the government's radar, yet it popped right up after the energy minister dropped a bombshell in the House last week when he in fact admitted that the government had wrongly claimed, on two different occasions, that all gas plant documents had been disclosed. We all know, of course, that that has been totally false. We've now had three different batches of documents released, and we know there are more still outstanding. The reason we

know this is that we still haven't seen any documents from the Premier's—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Point of order, the Minister of Research and Innovation.

Hon. Reza Moridi: Mr. Speaker, again, the speaker is talking about something which is not related to the subject matter of this debate. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I would say again to the member for Kitchener-Conestoga that it would be most helpful if his comments related back to Bill 6, the bill that is before the House that we are currently debating.

Mr. Michael Harris: And I'm getting to that; I'm going to bring it back to that. But I think it's important really to know that we still haven't seen any of those documents from the energy minister or the Premier's office.

Then, in the midst of this controversy, in comes the Liberals' Great Lakes—wait for it—Great Lakes bill. In what would seem to be a desperate attempt to change the channel on scandal, mismanagement and failure, the Liberals now want to talk about protecting our Great Lakes, a subject they know everyone really can agree with, at least in principle.

But we all need to ask ourselves, is more legislation really needed to protect the Great Lakes? And if we determine that it's not necessary, we then need to ask if this bill is actually the product of a public relations campaign to placate certain groups and create a narrative of protecting the environment, when in reality it only serves to complicate and confuse the environmental processes that we and our partners already have in place. Mr. Speaker, I am sure you can see that I am leaning towards the latter. The reason for this is that on too many occasions we have seen the Liberals slap a fancy title on a bill which has a pleasant-sounding preamble, yet is full of new regulatory overlap, duplication and conflict. I guess the Liberals are hoping people don't make it past the introduction to actually read the contents of their bills.

Look, we all want to protect the Great Lakes. We all have a duty to be stewards of our earth, and we simply cannot pass the environmental problems we have today on to our children tomorrow, just like we can't pass years of reckless spending and government waste on to the next generation, which this government will do. You know what? It's a \$12-billion deficit, some \$275 billion worth of debt.

I said just the other day that they increased the size of cabinet by five to 27, but they forgot one of the most important ministries: They should have appointed a ministry of debt. You know what? It's the third-largest expenditure line item the province of Ontario has. Do you know how much clout that minister sitting at a cabinet table would have? Next to health and education, debt would in theory have the loudest voice.

Interjections.

Mr. Michael Harris: What's one more, I suppose, and you never know. I think that possibly that may be

what one of the members from Scarborough is currently negotiating with, and who knows? She could come back as the minister of debt.

Individually, we need to take responsibility for our actions and understand the importance of our treasured resources that we have here in Ontario, like our Great Lakes. The Great Lakes play a major role in providing drinking water, shipping routes, and recreational activities like swimming, fishing or simply spending a day on the beach, which I know the minister will be looking forward to in the summertime, as I will. Just think that the Great Lakes are a direct source of drinking water for 33 million people, including about 10 million Canadians. Eighty per cent of Ontarians get their drinking water from the Great Lakes. These large bodies of fresh water also play a critical role in sustaining bi-national trade and economic activity here in Canada. In fact, the Great Lakes basin is home to 40% of Canada's economic activity and contributes \$180 billion to US-Canada trade.

The Great Lakes also support 25% of Canada's agricultural capacity—something I know the member for Oxford has spoken about at great length—45% of Canada's industrial capacity and inject \$12 billion into Ontario's tourism industry annually. Every year, more than 160 million metric tonnes of raw materials for manufacturing products and agricultural commodities are moved on the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Seaway; in fact, I had the opportunity to tour some of those sites as part of the general government committee on the review of the Aggregate Resources Act—on how materials like aggregates and cement are shipped using the Great Lakes by some of those companies here in Ontario.

Every year, more than 160 million metric tonnes—as I had said—are moved. This marine highway supports more than 100 ports and commercial docks located in Ontario, Quebec and eight Great Lakes states. The Great Lakes also support \$100 million in commercial fishing activity and \$350 million in recreational fishing activity. I'm sure many of our members enjoy getting out on a Sunday or a Saturday, casting a net and having a great old day in the sun. I'm not a big fish fan, but I enjoy fishing as a sport.

Clearly the importance of these valued resources cannot be overstated, but unfortunately it's not all a good-news story. The Great Lakes are facing a number of challenges as a result of urban encroachment, agricultural drainage, invasive species, toxic chemicals and a changing climate.

The continued introduction of aquatic invasive species is one of the most significant threats to biodiversity in the Great Lakes. Aquatic invasive species can degrade water quality by increasing turbidity, concentrating toxins, and altering nutrient and energy flows within the ecosystem. Zebra and quagga mussels are degrading water quality and increasing algae development and avian botulism.

Asian carp is an invasive species that is itching to enter into the Great Lakes, and this would be catastrophic. In fact, I was just reading an article the other day—

this is from December, from the Windsor Star, on how an Asian carp seizure at the Ambassador Bridge fined a company \$30,000; these eco-terrorists, as I like to call them, are a great threat to our Great Lakes. There had been traces, in fact, of Asian carp DNA found in Lake Michigan, and the live fish have turned up past the barriers created. These fish getting into our Great Lakes could possibly outnumber all native species. The economic impacts would be significant, too.

The Great Lakes are home to 130 endangered species, 30 million people, and a \$7-billion fishing industry. Asian carp have a history of threatening livelihoods as well as wildlife, which means we could see an encore of the same situation that happened in the Mississippi, Missouri and Illinois rivers here in Ontario. We must focus our attention on ensuring that these invasive species do not cross our borders.

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As Progressive Conservatives, we, in fact, will stand up to protect our Great Lakes and support their ecosystems by restricting dead and alive Asian carp from coming into our province and our waters. Currently, fish are being brought in on ice and seem dead, but once someone drops them in warm water, they come alive. This poses a huge risk to our native species and the toxicity of our Great Lakes. Aggressive steps have been taken to curtail them from entering our waterways or else these ecosystems and fishing businesses will be left with the price to pay.

Like people, a lake requires many nutrients in proper amounts to stay healthy. In the Great Lakes, phosphorus is the nutrient that has the most influence on the health of the ecosystems. Some areas of the Great Lakes have more phosphorus than they need to be healthy, and intervention is required to reduce phosphorus back to the appropriate levels.

When the balance is lost and phosphorus levels are too high, the excess phosphorus contributes to excess algal growth. Certain types of blue-green algae and other species may produce toxins that are harmful to both humans and wildlife.

Upgrades to municipal waste water treatment plants and limits on phosphorus levels in detergents started in the 1970s and were successful at reducing phosphorus levels, particularly in Lakes Ontario and Huron.

The accidental introduction of invasive zebra and quagga mussels to the Great Lakes, starting in the late 1980s, has dramatically changed how and where phosphorus is available for plant growth in the lakes. These mussels are efficient at filtering particulates and phosphorus out of water and converting phosphorus to a form that aquatic plants and algae can easily use to grow. In this way, nuisance aquatic plants and algae can thrive close to shore, where most of the mussels live.

Climate change impacts are observed in the Great Lakes basin as well. Some of the most evident impacts include warming temperatures, changing precipitation patterns, decreased ice coverage, and lower-than-average water levels. We need to engage real solutions to fight

climate change, like conserving energy, which would require us to use less power to heat our homes. You know that public buildings are some of the least energy-efficient buildings in Ontario. We must invest in public transit like subways, and encourage people to take the train into work.

Remediating the effects at the source of the problem is a concrete solution that would have a positive effect on the quality of our Great Lakes as well as on many other environmental issues.

We also need to work at preserving our green space, not just here in Toronto but across the countryside of our province of Ontario.

In fact, I had an opportunity to meet with some mayors and deputy mayors just yesterday at the ROMA conference, as well as some of my other colleagues. My colleagues from Parry Sound–Muskoka, Huron–Bruce, and Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound were there, and the member from Durham also sat in on the meeting.

In order for them to support their economies, whether it be fishing or shipping industries, they are spending thousands of dollars on emergency recovery programs when they could have resolved their low water levels with a permit for dredging from the Ministry of Natural Resources. In fact, they talked about the red tape that is holding back our businesses, farmers and municipalities to prevent lower-than-normal water levels, and it's way too much and it's creating more negative effects than positive. To effectively clean up the Great Lakes, we must look at the root of the problem, not create more regulation that stifles businesses, farmers, municipalities and even more.

I would like to take some time to go over the governance structure we currently have in place to address the threats to our Great Lakes, and how Ontario, Quebec and the eight Great Lakes states have co-operated to tackle these problems over the years.

To deal with these challenges, the United States and Canada signed the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement in 1972. I think the minister was just on his way, coming into the Legislature at that time—maybe five or seven years later. It was most recently updated in September when federal environment minister Peter Kent met with American officials to build on the last 40 years of binational co-operation to protect and remediate the Great Lakes. The agreement's goal is to restore and maintain the chemical, physical and biological integrity of the Great Lakes basin ecosystem.

Under the agreement, the US and Canadian governments have identified the need to:

- clean up areas of concern in the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin;
- develop a comprehensive lake-wide management plan to protect and remediate near-shore waters;
- reduce toxic chemicals in the Great Lakes, like mercury and PCBs;
- reduce nutrients like phosphorus that lead to the occurrence of algae blooms that degrade drinking water quality, impair fish spawning and adversely impact

commercial and recreational fishing, swimming, tourism and overall enjoyment of the Great Lakes;

— prevent discharges from shipping vessels, such as garbage, sewage, invasive species and other pollutants;

— stop the spread of invasive species by developing and implementing early detection and rapid response initiatives within two years;

— complete the development of and begin implementing lake-wide habitat and species protection, restoration and conservation strategies within two years;

— identify contaminants in groundwater discharge into the Great Lakes; and

— research the impacts of climate change.

This agreement also obliges Canada and the United States to address the use of specific toxic substances in the basin and to develop action plans for areas of concern, which are regions that have experienced significant environmental degradation over the years, such as beach closures, or a diminished ability to support aquatic life.

To oversee the development and implementation of these binational policy goals, the agreement has an oversight body, the International Joint Commission. The Canada-Ontario Agreement Respecting the Great Lakes Basin Ecosystem, or COA for short, was negotiated to help Canada fulfill its obligations under the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement and has been renewed roughly every five years since 1972.

Now, I know Ontario is currently in negotiations with the federal government about a new memorandum of co-operation to achieve the goals laid out in the recently updated Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement. I've heard the environment minister say many times that everyone has a part to play in protecting the Great Lakes. In the spirit of that co-operation, I hope my honourable colleague will give more notice and will actually work with the opposition parties in going over the new Canada-Ontario agreement this spring.

As part of the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, the International Joint Commission oversees the remediation of 15 areas of concern by ensuring that parties to the agreement have remedial action plans in place. Ontario is responsible for leading the remediation efforts in seven of Canada's 10 areas of concern. These include Nipigon Bay, Jackfish Bay, Peninsula Harbour, Spanish Harbour, Wheatley Harbour, the Niagara River and the Bay of Quinte. Through binational and federal-provincial negotiations, we've identified the areas we need to focus on to improve our environment and to ensure that Ontarians in these regions have access to safe, clean drinking water.

Ontario is also a member of the Great Lakes Charter, which is an agreement signed by Ontario, Quebec and eight of the Great Lakes states in 1985 to monitor issues related to water diversions in the Great Lakes basin. In 2001, the charter agreed to address bulk water exports and eventually produced two agreements in 2005: committing the members to ban new diversion and to use a consistent standard to review proposed uses of Great Lakes' water.

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With four of five Great Lakes within Ontario's boundaries and with a binational governance structure in place to protect and remediate these bodies of water, we clearly have a major role to play in this policy area, and we must continue to work with our federal government to meet our binational obligations.

But, for Ontario to do its part, we require the political will and a government that understands that the economy and the environment are not mutually exclusive. We need a government that offers a holistic approach on the Great Lakes that protects ecosystems but also develops sustainable infrastructure for tourism, water and waste water systems; a government that understands the important role the Great Lakes play in our manufacturing sector and broader economy; a government that understands that environmental efforts for remediation and improving water quality require an economic strategy that engages the clean-water technology sector and other innovative firms.

What we don't need is more delay, more review, more burdensome regulation and more needless bureaucracy. Take, for instance, some of Ontario's existing water legislation. We've got the Ontario Water Resources Act, the Clean Water Act, the Safe Drinking Water Act, the Nutrient Management Act, the Conservation Authorities Act and the Planning Act, to name a few.

So, again, I come back to the fundamental question I raised earlier: Is there actually a need for more legislation, especially when there's so much potential for overlap, duplication and conflict? Once you ask this question, you will end up with even more. For instance, if there was a need, why wasn't this legislation tabled earlier? If this legislation actually contains a policy improvement, why have the Liberals sat on their hands for nearly a decade? And if Ontario was having difficulties meeting its obligations under COA, why didn't the Liberals introduce a bill in 2007, when the agreement was in fact last renewed?

I find it passing strange that after four decades of co-operation and work between Ontario, Quebec and the eight Great Lakes states, as well as both the American and Canadian governments, we would just suddenly, out of the blue, require more legal tools to protect the Great Lakes.

What's the true motivation of this bill? Does the Ministry of the Environment simply want to increase its regulatory powers? Does the government want to empower its friends and certain interest groups? Is it an excuse for Ontario's lack of leadership on the Great Lakes after nearly a decade? Or, you know, is it simply window dressing for a government that's falling apart at the seams as a result of more than a decade of scandal, mismanagement and waste?

I know I've only got 27 minutes left, but I could seriously go off on those three issues in themselves: Ornge, eHealth—something we just talked about yesterday in committee, eHealth and the documents that we had asked for; a bit of a Freudian slip from one of

their members yesterday, so we're not sure really where that's going, but we'll play that out as it comes—and extracurriculars, something that we talked greatly about yesterday.

When you talk about the Great Lakes, I know I've had many students in my office that—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): As Acting Speaker, I'm compelled to remind the member for Kitchener—Conestoga to bring his remarks back to Bill 6. I would have to ask him to do so. Thank you very much.

Mr. Michael Harris: You know what? I talked about scandal and mismanagement and waste. You can just imagine the amount of funds available to address some of the issues that our Great Lakes are experiencing right now.

As I mentioned earlier, I had a group of students in my office just the other day. We were talking about a variety of environmental issues, because students today, whether they're in public school, in their early years, or in high school, are very concerned about the environment. The Great Lakes are obviously a part of that concern, especially for schools that border the Great Lakes. You know what? They were in my office because it was after school, and their extracurriculars had been taken away from them. I had an opportunity quickly to address that yesterday, and I thank Lisa MacLeod, the member from Nepean—Carleton, I believe, who brought forward that necessary motion. It's really a shame that the NDP and the Liberals wouldn't stand with the students, and on the other hand they stood with the unions on this one.

I've had many students talk about the importance of extracurriculars, not just from sports, but even from an environmental club that would talk about Great Lakes' issues—but students who are working toward getting into college or university, they need that extra little bit of help in the morning or after school.

Again, I could go on on that scandal, mismanagement and waste, but I want to go back to the last point as to why, perhaps, I think this Great Lakes bill was brought forward. Could it be just smoke and mirrors to distract Ontarians from truly paying attention to the Liberal gas plant scandal, that cost taxpayers and potentially will cost them upwards of \$1.3 billion? I can't fathom what we could have used that money for—whether it's health care, education, protecting our environment, creating jobs etc.

Mr. Speaker, you can see this bill has plenty more questions than answers. So I briefly want to summarize the bill before looking at each section in detail. In this bill, the Liberals want to create another advisory board, but haven't specified its membership or explained how much it would cost. In fact, we heard my colleague today from Simcoe North, Mr. Garfield Dunlop, talk about another unnecessary board, the College of Trades, and that, if elected, a PC government would abolish it. It's simply an unnecessary level of bureaucracy that's now wanting to impose a trades tax on some of our hardest-working Ontarians.

They want to create a series of different regulations for numerous yet undetermined geographic areas, again without providing a price tag or detailing how this additional red tape would affect local governments, farmers and businesses. They want to create another regulator for Ontario's shorelines while giving no particular reason or estimated costs in this bill—Bill 6; that's what I'm talking about here. We could go on and probably talk 60 minutes on the College of Trades, but we're not. We're talking about Bill 6.

When asked about these issues, the Liberals have, in fact, refused to respond, leaving stakeholders who I've met with scratching their heads. Perhaps that's why last year the Liberals left the bill sitting for months. Once you read it, you immediately get the sense that it could barely even serve as a discussion paper. Some of its sections, especially the guardians' council, are more open-ended than a Liberal campaign promise.

At first it was difficult to determine if this lack of clarity was the result of Liberal obfuscation or simply incompetence, but it didn't take long for most observers to conclude that the Liberals had, yet again, failed to do their homework. Bill 6 is just a regulatory mess waiting to happen.

So I would like to take some time now to go through the bill. The stated purpose of the bill fits nicely into the Liberals' window-dressing strategy. I mean, who wouldn't want to protect and restore the Great Lakes? It all sounds good until you get to part II, and read about the Liberals' plan to create yet another advisory council to review, delay and advise instead of acting. Real action: something this party, under the leadership of Tim Hudak, has presented over the last four months, while this Liberal government prorogued Parliament in a cynical attempt to save Liberal seats and hide the truth from Ontarians, going back to the power plants.

This bill is nothing more than lofty statements followed by a potential web of bureaucracy that could soon form, if it were ever passed into law.

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As usual, there's no price tag attached to anything in this bill. The Liberals' proposed advisory council could cost millions to operate. The new regulatory areas that may be created as a result of the bill could cost local governments, farmers and businesses millions of dollars to comply with. The new shoreline regulations could end up generating millions of dollars in new revenue from fining violations, and the regulatory duplication among the Ministries of the Environment, Agriculture and Food—don't forget Food—Municipal Affairs and Housing, and Natural Resources could cost the government millions in operational inefficiencies. But we can't be sure. We just don't know. The Liberals have provided no details whatsoever. They just table a bill and ask Ontarians to hand over a blank cheque. We all know about that.

As a reminder, this troubling trend was precisely the reason I introduced my bill last year—last session—to force the government to table financial details in the

House with each and every one of its bills. But we all know what the Liberals did. They rejected the bill, claiming that due diligence is simply just a waste of time. Instead, the Liberals would prefer to table a bill, claiming it's all motherhood and apple pie with a side of ice cream, while downplaying the potential costs. But Ontarians deserve to know how much of their money the Liberals intend to spend, because at the end of the day, they're the ones who will be left to pick up the tab, just like in the case of Mississauga and Oakville: a cynical decision to save Liberal seats, and you get the bill for it.

You can't divorce the economy from the environment. As I say quite frequently, good environmental policy requires a proper cost-benefit analysis, something folks do each and every day, whether it's in their business or in their home. If you want to go and buy a new TV, no doubt you'll have to provide some sort of cost-benefit analysis to your spouse to ensure that that gets bought and put up on wall—something we do each and every day.

But that's exactly what the Liberals have done in yet another of their environmental bills. The words "job" or "jobs" don't even appear in the Liberals' proposed Great Lakes Protection Act, or shall I now say, An Act to protect and restore the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin. With little to no mention of the economy, the Liberals have basically told environmental companies that maintaining the health of the Great Lakes requires top-down government instead of a healthy, meaningful partnership with the private sector to develop innovative new technologies in order to remediate areas of concern and improve water quality, not to mention that there's no provision in Bill 6 that requires the government to consider the economic and social impacts of potential new regulations created under the proposed act.

I know the government has a token regulatory impact assessment policy that it rarely, if ever, uses. So, for the government to say that this policy should address regulatory concerns with Bill 6 is, in fact, laughable. The Liberals have an extremely poor track record of cooperatively working with local governments—as we have likely seen from the Green Energy act, to remind Ontarians—farmers and businesses to ensure that the laws and regulations they create are fair and balanced. We know that we simply can't trust the Liberals to actually evaluate the consequences of their decisions—only after the fact.

Then there's the Liberals' grand Great Lakes Strategy, which obviously could have been created without the bill before the House. But again, to give the impression that they're taking action, the Liberals have elevated a policy document to a matter of law. Unfortunately, this strategy fails to embrace a holistic view of the Great Lakes, like the one called the Great Lakes Heritage Coast initiative, offered by the former PC government. This document was developed by the member for Halton as part of Ontario's Living Legacy, and a legacy it is. I've spoken to many conservation groups who have said that our party took bold action on this policy matter and really led

the way by providing a thoughtful, balanced direction for maintaining the health of our Great Lakes.

You see, we knew then, as we do now, that the environment and the economy are not mutually exclusive. That's why we had identified the need for coordination on the Great Lakes, to protect ecosystems while also developing sustainable infrastructure for tourism, water and waste water systems.

I would like to thank and commend the member for Halton for his leadership on this file.

If any of the members opposite, those new or old, would like a great read, stop by my office, 344, and I'll provide a copy of that document for you.

I want to get back to Bill 6, because I know that everyone on that side is listening attentively. I want to talk about the provision that would give the government the authority to establish new regulatory areas called geographically focused initiatives. As a way to give the appearance that the process will be driven from the bottom up, the Liberals are allowing public bodies to submit proposals for establishing a GFI.

Here is the first problem: Not everyone agrees with the Liberals' interpretation of what constitutes a public body. In the definition, the Liberals have included source water protection committees, which at times have been guided by partisan politics instead of sound science. Still, under Bill 6, source water protection committees will be able to submit proposals to establish GFIs, which may or may not correspond to one of Ontario's 19 different source water protection regions or areas.

The first problem with the GFI model, obviously, is that it will lead to numerous new regulations that will vary by region, which has already been the case under the source water protection act. Then these new regulations will create overlap, conflict and duplication with other regulations in other areas. This could soon create a regulatory web that the government would then have to expend valuable time, money and resources untangling, not to mention that the regulatory burden on new development will substantially increase, thereby creating new headaches for local governments already struggling to make ends meet. Municipalities rely on new property tax revenue and development charges to invest in improving roads, bridges and public facilities. But home builders and developers, who already deal with most of the red tape in the province, warn that the ever-increasing regulatory burden may cause them to cut costs and lay off workers. Just think: A developer in Lincoln, Ontario, for instance, may already have to comply with the town's official plan and zoning bylaws, the region of Niagara bylaws, the Planning Act, the Niagara Escarpment Planning and Development Act, the Greenbelt Act, the conservation authority regulations and source water protection regulations, and now the Liberals want to add yet another layer of red tape by creating a GFI.

The only comfort the Liberals have offered to businesses drowning in red tape is that the executive council will sort out the regulatory duplication at a later date. This is just another classic example of the Liberals'

philosophy: Legislate first and figure out the details later. Again, this philosophy rests on the implicit assumption that we can all trust the Liberals to live up to their word—I've got 11 minutes yet; we could probably go on for 60 just on that item alone. Well, I can say there are plenty of groups that won't fall for this ploy once again.

Neither will they fall for the Liberals' claim that this proposed act will favour local decision-making. Let's take a look at the facts. Under the proposed act, interested bodies must consult with the minister and receive cabinet approval at the proposal stage. Right from the start, the minister can influence the very conception of the proposal. Then the proposal has to be tabled at the guardians' council. We'll come back to the subject of the guardians' council in just a bit, but suffice it to say that this body will be just another board stacked with Liberals to make Liberal policy.

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But back to the process. If the guardians' council approves the proposal, it is then sent to cabinet for final approval. It is at this point that the Liberals say cabinet will sort out any regulatory conflict. Again, the final decision is completely left up to the government. At every stage from the conception of the proposal to its finalization, the Liberal government will control the process—frightening. The only crumb offered to municipalities is that they'll have the ability to submit a proposal for a new regulatory area. However, if they don't submit one, another public body, like a source water protection committee, for instance, may choose to go ahead without or with them. This is a perfect example of special-purpose groups superseding elected officials.

Let's say another public body did have a proposal approved by the Liberal government. According to Bill 6, if there are any instances of conflict, a designated policy within the GFI prevails over a municipality's official plan or zoning bylaws. That means if a new regulatory area is established, municipalities must amend their official plans and bylaws to conform with designated policies set out in an initiative.

These new regulatory areas would also tie the hands of local officials in the future. The bill states, "Municipalities and municipal planning authorities are prohibited from undertaking any public work or other undertaking and from passing any bylaw that conflicts with a designated policy set out in an initiative." This bill clearly takes more power away from the municipalities by placing it in the hands of the cabinet, but I have to say I'm not surprised.

The Liberal government also deprived municipalities of local decision-making to make their green energy social experiment a reality in the backyards of rural landowners. Then, as a meaningless gesture, the Premier offered to be the part-time Minister of Agriculture and Food, even though she's unable to answer the most basic questions involved in the file. This is a government that clearly doesn't care about the concerns of rural Ontario and does everything it can to centralize more and more power into the hands of Toronto-based Liberal policy-

makers. And now we have yet another piece of legislation before us in this House that trumps municipal plans and bylaws and forces local governments to work around new regulations in order to ensure their existing policies align with the Toronto-knows-best government of the Premier.

But Bill 6 doesn't just duplicate the efforts of conservation authorities and municipalities. It also duplicates the work done by Canada and the US under the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, and in turn the work done by the federal and provincial governments under the Canada-Ontario agreement.

At every turn along the way the Liberals attempt to reinvent the wheel. The first and most obvious example of this is that the Liberals want to create new geographic initiatives when we have already determined the areas of concern.

What has the McGuinty-Wynne government discovered that nobody caught for the last 40 years of Great Lakes protection? Well, if you ask that question, the answer would be, they just don't know. That's why the Liberals are proposing to create the Great Lakes Guardians' Council to determine what government priorities should be. You see, this is really where the whole thing gets quite ridiculous.

Let's go through the whole muddled argument again to see if we can make any sense of it. First, the Liberals say we need new legislation to protect and restore the Great Lakes, even though Canada and the US have been doing so for the last 40 years. The immediate question, as I stated before, becomes, then why on earth do we need new legislation? The Liberals' answer to this question is that we need to deal with today's priorities with new legal tools. When you ask them what their priorities are, they respond by saying, "We're creating another council to help us figure out what these priorities will be." Since there are already binational and federal-provincial structures in place to set those priorities, why doesn't the government take its cues from these forums? After all, the Great Lakes is a binational issue. That's why we have several different advisory boards already. We have the International Joint Commission; the Great Lakes Water Quality Board; the newly created Great Lakes Executive Committee, whose job it is to set priorities for protecting and remediating the Great Lakes; and we have the management committee of COA, which also sets priorities for maintaining the health of the Great Lakes. What purpose will yet another advisory board serve, especially one that has no representatives from the American or Canadian governments?

My guess is that the government wants to use this new advisory board as a political arm of the government to advance its agenda and empower its buddies while pretending to remain objective. Although there are token references to industry, agriculture and municipalities, the minister can appoint whomever he wants to the guardians' council. I would be quite interested to see the Liberals' roster of potential candidates. At the end of the day, objective advice on something as complex as

managing the Great Lakes is always a welcome thing, but that advice should be firmly based on science. With the unlimited and unrestrained power of the minister to appoint whomever he wants, it's hard to see how this council could be guided by anything other than politics. The Liberals still haven't said how much this council is going to cost. Ontarians deserve to know if they'll be forced to fork over millions of dollars to operate a new wing of the Liberal government.

I want to move on to the government's decision to triple up on shoreline regulations. Even though Ontario already has laws and regulations in place for the province's shorelines, that didn't stop the Liberals from pushing forward with a list of new powers in Bill 6 that would conflict with and supersede those outlined in the Conservation Authorities Act and Planning Act. Here's another classic example of legislative and regulatory duplication created by the Liberals. First of all, the Conservation Authorities Act already gives conservation authorities the power to regulate the development of shorelines with the approval of the Minister of Natural Resources. Then, the Planning Act gives municipalities the authority to prohibit development on its shorelines. Now the Minister of the Environment wants in on the action and it wants the power to collect fees for violations.

The jury is still out on which shorelines the minister will regulate. That decision is being left up to—you guessed it—the Liberals' guardians' council. Yet again, the Liberals are attempting to increase their powers despite increasing regulatory overlap between the Minister of Natural Resources and the Ministry of the Environment. It would seem as though the Liberals want to centralize regulatory power under the Ministry of the Environment, and the Liberals may intend to have the proposed Great Lakes Protection Act subsume all other legislation or regulations that deal with the Great Lakes.

The most concerning of all provisions in this section of the bill is that the government would have the authority to appoint a public body to administer—which could be in addition to a conservation authority—to enforce and collect fees for new shoreline regulations. Clearly, this is an attempt by the government to raise new revenues to execute its plans under the Great Lakes Protection Act, and although this bill contains a provision to resolve duplication, the entire section on shoreline regulation contains massive regulatory conflict, duplication and overreach.

Homebuilders already cope with probably the most onerous regulatory burden in the province, dealing with regulations, laws and policy plans at the municipal, provincial and federal level, and now Bill 6 will simply add a level and one more layer to that.

To conclude: At no time have the Liberals offered a legitimate reason why the government needs to centralize regulatory power or needs to increase the size and cost of government by adding even more bureaucracy. I know members—at least the ones on this side of the House—will agree that no serious piece of legislation leaves so

many more important questions unanswered and has no price tag attached to it. What we don't need is more delay, more review, more burdensome regulation and more needless bureaucracy, something we've seen for the last 10 years that Ontarians, Ontario businesses, municipalities simply cannot afford. So I think it's more clear than ever that the government, in fact, doesn't lack those legal tools; it lacks the political leadership to actually get the job done.

1750

I hope the minister has noted the concerns that I have raised and will strongly consider them moving forward. As I've mentioned, this bill is simply an unnecessary duplication, a series of regulatory burdens that Ontarians simply can't afford.

That being said, I'll leave the last few seconds to just simply thank those who are watching at home for their time and wrap it up from there.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's a pleasure to be back. I'll be a bit—well, I've always been rusty, so I'll be a bit more rusty. I'd like to take this opportunity to add some comments to the member from Kitchener-Conestoga on the bill, the Great Lakes Protection Act, introduced by the Minister of the Environment.

Some of my residents, the residents of Timiskaming-Cochrane, will be surprised that they're actually even impacted by this bill—because Lake Timiskaming is the headwaters of the Ottawa River. Not all of my district is impacted, however, because, for some of you who may never have been up there, the northern watershed is in my riding. On the north of the northern watershed, the water goes to Hudson Bay.

One thing I think is, who wouldn't want to provide more protection for our waterways, for our environment? I don't think there's an argument about that at all. We're glad the minister introduced this act. We think this act deserves debate, but where we're concerned, especially from an agriculture perspective, is we think that legislation should be developed from the shore up, not from bureaucracy down.

I'm not opposed to discussing legislation; that's what we're here for. But we have to ensure that we're not just creating more legislation for the fact that we're sitting here and needing something to do—and I'm not saying we're doing that, but we have to make sure we're not. I'm not saying that. But we have to make sure that legislation that we create here works on the ground, works on the shoreline and works on the farms, because if it doesn't, we're wasting our time and taxpayers' money, and we're not helping our environment.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I always enjoy the speeches.

The hardest job in the world has got to be the environment critic for the Progressive Conservative Party, because you always have to take the anti-environment stand. The researchers who write all these are pretty

right-wing people, probably unlike the member for Kitchener, who I don't think is that far to the right.

I do see the influence of a fellow from eastern Ontario from the landowners' association on this speech, as well. So you've done a good job in penetrating the Progressive Conservative Party.

I look at it and say that I don't know where the speech went, because on one hand it said, "Do more," and on the other hand it said, "Do less." We think that there can be an awful lot that will be accomplished with this particular bill.

Also, I'm going to be very interested in hearing the New Democratic Party critic, because the last statement I heard made me a bit apprehensive. I hope that Ruth Grier is watching today—you would remember Ruth Grier—and Bud Wildman, to hear the present NDP position, at least this afternoon, on this bill. I'm sure the critic from downtown Toronto may have a bit of a different viewpoint.

I do want to say I commiserate with my friend the member for Kitchener, who is the critic, because time and time again he has to take the anti-environment stand.

There was widespread consultation. The Great Lakes mayors, who are really concerned about these matters, were consulted very extensively. They had considerable input. They were applauding this act being implemented. Certainly the environmental and naturalist groups around the province were absolutely delighted to see something that is going to protect the Great Lakes for future generations.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Randy Hillier: I want to just reaffirm and reiterate a little bit of what the member from Kitchener-Conestoga spoke about, and that is how fast this was brought forward and without any forethought and any real discussion and debate. That was borne out very clearly by the member from Ottawa-Orléans in his speech, where he mentioned that this bill would protect the watershed of the Ottawa River, including La Verendrye park and all these beautiful places. I'll have to inform this House that La Verendrye park is in Quebec, and this assembly does not have any jurisdiction over there.

Interjection.

Mr. Randy Hillier: This assembly does not have any jurisdiction there, and should this bill be brought forward, would be unconstitutional if it was to have, as the member from Ottawa-Orléans suggested.

Truly, even when the government members haven't read and don't understand either their geography or their legislation, there's a problem over there on the Liberal side, and we can help them out on both those ends, geography and legislation.

I think it's important as well, Speaker, that we recognize that although we hear all the platitudes of collaboration and compromise and singing Kumbaya with the throne speech and from the new Premier, the critic was not even given a briefing on this bill—not even given a

briefing ahead of time. Again, actions and words betray themselves and contradict themselves with this Liberal—now, I know the environment minister. I'm sure he has a big heart, but he does have to—maybe he's trying to get the e-testing scandal fixed up there to actually—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Ms. Cindy Forster: I want to thank the minister and the member from St. Catharines; the member from Kitchener-Conestoga—I know it's difficult to get up here and speak for an hour on this issue; the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane and from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington.

My riding actually borders on two Great Lakes, and I'm looking forward to the debate on this legislation. I don't know whether there's duplication or not. I don't know how our environmental critic is going to respond in his lead-in, but I'm sure we'll find that out very shortly.

I can tell you that, living in the Niagara region, we have many days where people can't use our beaches because the E. coli levels are so high. We have many days when we have to boil water because of the number of properties that—through, I would say, the failure of the Planning Act, in the early days provided for many, many properties on very small parcels of land. So it is an issue for the Niagara region.

I have attended a number of Great Lakes conferences in my years in municipal politics. I know that the mayors of the Great Lakes are certainly advocates of protecting and improving the water quality. I think that, for all Ontarians, we need to ensure that they have safe access to our beaches, to our water. As the member from Kitchener-Conestoga said, it is our drinking water in many of our municipalities, so we need to ensure that we have a safe, reliable source of water as well. Thank you for the opportunity.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments. We return to the member for Kitchener-Conestoga for his two-minute reply.

Mr. Michael Harris: Thank you, Speaker. I'd like to thank the members from Timiskaming-Cochrane, of course the minister and member from St. Catharines, of course our member from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington, and, finally, the member for Welland, for their comments on this.

I think it's important just to recap again quickly to remind folks that the environment and the economy are not mutually exclusive. We talk about the regulatory overlap, the regulatory burden. What we don't need is more delay, more review and more burdensome regulations.

I talked about the developer in Lincoln, and I just want to reiterate that example because this truly sums up what this bill is all about. Just think what this developer in Lincoln, which is not too far away from the minister's riding, already has to comply with: the town's official plan and zoning bylaws, the region of Niagara's bylaws, the Planning Act, the Niagara Escarpment Planning and

Development Act, the Greenbelt Act, the conservation authority's regulations and the source water protection regulations. Now they want to add another layer of regulatory burden to that.

Mr. Randy Hillier: The guardians.

Mr. Michael Harris: The guardian—the GFI.

So that somewhat sums it up. We've been here 10 years. This is simply an opportunity or a smokescreen to get everyone to talk and have a Kumbaya—you know what? Again, we've got a great track record. You look at

the Living Legacy, the track record the Ontario PCs have on the environment. What we don't want is a track record of more regulatory burden put on businesses, farmers and municipalities in the province of Ontario. Thank you for the opportunity.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It being 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow morning at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1801.

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No. 7



Nº 7

ISSN 1180-2987

**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

Second Session, 40th Parliament



**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

Thursday 28 February 2013

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Deuxième session, 40^e législature

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Jeudi 28 février 2013

**Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac**

**Clerk
Deborah Deller**

**Président
L'honorable Dave Levac**

**Greffière
Deborah Deller**

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 28 February 2013

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 28 février 2013

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Speaker?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Point of order.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Yes, Speaker, I seek unanimous consent that, in order to expedite the check-in process and make our Legislative security services job easier, members of the public gallery be allowed to wear work-related apparel in the galleries of the Legislative Assembly today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member has asked for unanimous consent. Do I hear unanimous consent? I heard a no.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

AMBULANCE AMENDMENT ACT (AIR AMBULANCES), 2013 LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES AMBULANCES (SERVICES D'AMBULANCE AÉRIENS)

Ms. Matthews moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 11, An Act to amend the Ambulance Act with respect to air ambulance services / Projet de loi 11, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les ambulances en ce qui concerne les services d'ambulance aériens.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member from Oak Ridges-Markham.

I'm pleased to address the Legislature today at this second reading of our proposed amendments to the Ambulance Act. I rise to speak to legislative amendments that will entrench greater oversight for Ontario's air ambulance service, ensure best value for taxpayer dollars and, above all, provide the highest possible quality patient care.

I want to start today by extending my most heartfelt thanks to the paramedics, the pilots and the front-line staff at Ornge. These are the people who work tirelessly every day to provide life-saving care to Ontarians across the province, and it is vitally important that we recognize them. I've had the opportunity to visit a number of Ornge bases in Sudbury, Thunder Bay, Toronto and London,

and I can tell you that the paramedics, pilots and front-line staff are as committed as ever to providing safe and high-quality care for the people of this province.

I'd like to acknowledge that this has been a very difficult time for front-line staff at Ornge, and yet their life-saving around-the-clock work never stopped. They never lost sight of their responsibility to patients. I want them to know that I am tremendously proud of their work, their passion and their dedication to the people of Ontario, and so I'd like to thank each and every one of them.

There are also a few others I would like to recognize. Ontario owes a great debt of gratitude to board chair Ian Delaney and board members Barry McLellan, Maneesh Mehta, Patricia Lang, Patrice Merrin, Charles Harnick and Trish Volker for their work. I'd like to emphasize that, unlike in the past, this is a voluntary board of directors. Their expenses are posted online.

I'd like to thank Ron McKerlie, former interim president and CEO. Mr. McKerlie was tasked with driving transformational change at Ornge, and I thank him for his dedicated efforts in doing so.

I'd like to thank Dr. Andrew McCallum, Ornge's new president and CEO. Dr. McCallum comes to Ornge with experience as a medical officer and flight surgeon in the Canadian Forces, chief of emergency medicine and chief of staff at Hamilton Health Sciences, and chief coroner of Ontario, amongst many other positions. Dr. McCallum is exceptionally qualified to serve in his new role.

I'd like to thank Rob Giguere, who was appointed COO—chief operating officer—in December 2012. Mr. Giguere is overseeing aviation operations in the operations control centre to ensure that all teams are working together. I know that the experience he brings to his position will serve him very well.

I would also like to thank Bruce Farr, the acting vice-president of operations, who comes to us from Toronto EMS.

There is a very strong leadership team in place now at Ornge, and I know that the 600-plus members of the Ornge team remain committed to Ornge's core mission of providing life-saving care to Ontario patients at a very critical time.

Their commitment is showing results. Nowhere is this more evident than in the many improvements that have taken place at Ornge over the past year. To begin, we now have a fully amended performance agreement with Ornge in place. We know now that the original performance agreement simply did not provide the accountability, oversight and transparency needed by govern-

ment. This amended performance agreement safeguards patient care and ensures better value for taxpayer dollars.

Under the terms of this agreement, ministry approval is required for any changes to Ornge's corporate structure, including the sale of assets. It requires detailed financial planning, monitoring, control and reporting obligations to increase accountability. It ensures compliance with the Public Sector Salary Disclosure Act and the Broader Public Sector Accountability Act. It increases audit and inspection powers by my ministry and introduces debt control provisions to prevent debt increases without ministry approval. Finally, it introduces quality improvement provisions based on the Excellent Care for All Act. This includes linking executive compensation to performance improvement targets in an annual quality improvement plan.

Ornge is well into a new chapter and is on the right path forward. Ontario now has a culture that puts patients first, that respects taxpayers and that values transparency. Further, over the past months, Ornge has continued to take significant steps to renew its organization.

As part of its patient-centred focus, Ornge has introduced a new patient relations process, making it easier for a patient or family member to express complaints or concerns or to ask a question or to give feedback. This new process also includes a more accessible patient relations section on the Ornge website.

Ornge now has a new patient advocate, Denise Polgar, who acts as liaison with patients and families, works to resolve their concerns about patient care and who can also suggest operational improvements based on what is learned from the patient relations process.

These changes demonstrate that Ornge takes concerns about patient transportation very seriously and is committed to working with families and patients to address complaints and resolve issues.

As part of its commitment to promote integrity and trust at all levels of the organization, Ornge has also introduced a new conflict-of-interest policy to further improve transparency and accountability. The new policy includes rules about real or potential conflicts in hiring, outside business interests and the disclosure of confidential information. The policy was approved by Ornge's volunteer board of directors, and it requires that all current and new employees declare potential or actual conflicts of interest.

In December 2012, Ornge introduced a new whistleblower policy. The policy encourages employees at all levels of the organization to act with integrity. It also protects those same employees to come forward without fear of reprisal. It will help to ensure the highest standard of ethics and professionalism. Ornge is also making significant strides to improve its operations.

0910

As part of its commitment to patients in northern Ontario, Ornge has taken important steps to increase staffing levels at the Thunder Bay base. Ornge is adding a third team of paramedics dedicated to performing transports on helicopters, which will complement the two fully staffed

and medically equipped airplanes that operate out of the Thunder Bay base. This change means that each of the three Ornge aircraft in Thunder Bay will have its own dedicated crew of paramedics to support 24/7 operations in Thunder Bay.

In September, Ornge also announced a new dedicated patient flight service for the Sault Ste. Marie-to-Sudbury corridor. This service provides airplane flights for patients with scheduled appointments for hospital treatment. To meet the needs of patients requiring this service, an advanced level of medical care will be offered on these flights. The program will allow Ornge to free up its dedicated airplanes and helicopters for urgent and emergency cases.

The new leadership at Ornge has also addressed concerns brought forward by front-line paramedics with a new interim interior for its fleet of AW139 helicopters. The new interim interiors will allow paramedics to perform CPR at any time during flight. They were approved by Transport Canada in January and are similar to the medical interiors used in other AW139 emergency helicopters around the world. The new interim interiors have been installed in 100% of the AW139 helicopters.

Finally, Ornge recently submitted its first quality improvement plan to my ministry. It highlights recent successes at Ornge and outlines areas for continued improvement. I'd like to highlight a few of those recent successes. From October to December 2012, Ornge confirmed its ability to respond to a call for on-scene service within 10 minutes of the start of a call 90% of the time. In 96% of the time, Ornge was able to meet their target of verifying their ability to service a call for an inter-facility transfer within 20 minutes. Success in recruiting new helicopter and airplane pilots means that from October to December 2012, Ornge was able to staff their aircraft at the Ontario air ambulance standard of two pilots at all times 97% of the time. During the same period, there was a 97.3% base aircraft availability. Finally, in September 2012, Ornge scored 90% on the quality-of-care metric, an indicator that reviews care against industry standards in eight key critical care areas. These many accomplishments mean that Ontario patients and Ontario families can count on the highest possible quality of patient care.

As I mentioned, the quality improvement plan also includes a road map for Ornge's future, with specific and measurable targets for improvement. Speaker, these accomplishments outlined above represent just some of the important changes Ornge has made as it works to restore public trust in Ornge's air ambulance system.

I'm now very pleased to speak to amendments to the Ambulance Act being proposed today. I want to be very clear that these amendments are the most important step we can all take to further entrench stronger oversight and restore public confidence in Ontario's air ambulance service. It is absolutely critical that employees do not feel intimidated when raising concerns. Ornge understands how important this is, and I'm pleased that the organization has introduced its own whistleblower policy.

Our proposed legislation would entrench protection for whistle-blowers at Ornge who disclose information to

an inspector, to an investigator or to the government. These amendments would allow the government to take control of Ornge in extraordinary circumstances through the appointment of a supervisor, just like we can with our hospitals. It would allow us to appoint special investigators where it is in the public interest to do so. The new legislation, if passed, would also give the government the power to appoint members to Ornge's board of directors and it would allow the government to make changes to the performance agreement. While improvements have already been made, these proposed amendments are important because they will further entrench this progress.

Speaker, I'm also taking another step to enhance transparency at Ornge. I know how important transparency is to ensuring accountability and restoring public trust in Ontario's air ambulance system, and I know this is a commitment that the new leadership at Ornge shares.

In addition to this legislation, our government is proposing to make Ornge subject to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, through regulation. This regulation has now been posted for public commentary. It would allow for freedom-of-information requests to be made of Ornge retroactive to the organization's foundation. The step is consistent with our government's commitment to increasing transparency across the broader public sector, including the health care sector.

For example, we've expanded freedom-of-information provisions to cover Ontario Power Generation, Hydro One, universities and Cancer Care Ontario. Local public utilities were brought back under freedom of information in 2004, and we have made hospitals subject to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, effective January 1, 2012.

The amendments we're proposing today are also part of our broad government commitment to raise the bar on accountability and transparency in Ontario. Since 2003, our government has taken a series of steps to improve oversight of Ontario's tax dollars. When we were first elected, we were told by the previous government that there was no deficit in the province of Ontario. As it turned out, there was a significant deficit. That will never happen again because we've given the Auditor General the responsibility of signing off on our books prior to an election.

We introduced the Broader Public Sector Accountability Act, which prohibits the practice of hiring external lobbyists with taxpayer dollars in hospitals, other large public sector organizations and publicly funded organizations that receive more than \$10 million in government funds.

We brought in stronger expense and procurement rules for broader public sector organizations. We require all hospitals and LHINs to report on their use of consultants and to post online the expense claim information for their senior leadership. We also require all hospitals and LHINs to sign attestations that they're in compliance with the new procurement requirements.

The amendments to the Ambulance Act that we're proposing today are very much in keeping with our gov-

ernment's commitment to refocus our health care system on the patient. By centering care around patients, we're improving Ontarians' experience with the health care system and achieving better value for money.

For example, through our Excellent Care for All Act, we've ensured that the quality of the patient experience is measured in a standardized way and reported publicly. We also now hold executives accountable for the quality of care they deliver. We listen to patients and ensure that quality committees in each health care organization use the results of patient surveys to create benchmarks for improving the standard of care. Further, patients have a formal mechanism to have their questions and concerns addressed through a patient advocate process.

We focused health care leadership on the task of changing the culture so that quality care for patients is the most important job that every single person in the organization has. Hospitals now have quality improvement plans, which are publicly posted, and executive compensation is linked to the achievement of outcomes identified in these plans.

I'm very proud of these improvements, and I'm proud they were achieved in an atmosphere of transparency and accountability. This action is all about respecting the hard-earned money of Ontario taxpayers. I'm determined to deliver the best value for our health care dollars. It's why we're driving quality and value into every corner of the health care system, and it's why we're bringing in these legislative amendments today.

From patients to doctors, front-line paramedics to hospital administrators, personal support workers to those in LHINs and the front-line staff and new leadership at Ornge, we all have a role to play in improving our health care system. I stand in the House today with full confidence that we're leaving no stone unturned to improve Ontario's air ambulance service.

Almost a year ago, the Auditor General of Ontario brought forward his value-for-money report. He had a number of specific recommendations to improve oversight, accountability and, above all, patient safety at Ornge. I'm pleased to say that we have acted on virtually every one of those recommendations. Because of this, I know that Ornge is now well into a new chapter and is on the right path forward. I'm confident that Ornge's new team, led by Dr. Andrew McCallum and board chair Ian Delaney, will continue the remarkable progress which has already been made. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. The member for Oak Ridges—Markham.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to address our government's proposed amendments to the Ambulance Act. I want to make it clear that our government is absolutely dedicated to ensuring that Ontario's air and critical care land ambulance service is focused on its core mission of providing life-saving care to Ontarians.

0920

The amendments that our government is proposing are very important because they would, first of all, entrench

accountability and transparency in Ontario's air ambulance service; ensure that Ontario patients and families are getting the highest possible quality patient care; and ensure that Ontario's taxpayers receive the best value for their taxpayer dollars—Ontario taxpayers have every right to know how health care dollars are spent—and restore public confidence in an organization that provides life-saving emergency medicine. Our government's commitment to these proposed amendments demonstrates our unwavering commitment to implement the Auditor General's recommendations.

Before I speak to today's proposed amendments, I want to commend Ornge on the significant progress they have made over the past year. There are too many achievements to cover fully, but I'd like to speak about a few.

First of all, in regards to leadership, Ornge has a new leadership team in place. Dr. Andrew McCallum is now the president and CEO. Dr. McCallum was trained as a military flight surgeon and is the former chief coroner of Ontario. He has also held senior posts at hospitals in Toronto and Hamilton, and will certainly help us in our efforts to improve oversight and accountability at Ornge. Former Skyservice president Rob Giguere is now the chief operating officer. There is a newly appointed board of directors led by Ian W. Delaney, chairman of Sherritt International. I'd also like to point out that members now serve on the board as volunteers. Ornge has also appointed a quality of care committee under the direction of Dr. Barry McLellan, president and CEO of Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre, and executive expenses and salary ranges are now posted online.

Mr. Speaker, I want to be very clear, and I know that members on both sides of the House will agree: We have very high expectations of our health care leaders. We trust them not only to provide excellent patient care, but to manage public money in a way that Ontarians expect and deserve. We expect them to stay true to their responsibility to others and to ensure that their service to patients and taxpayers is at the core of their operations. I'm so pleased that the leadership team led by Dr. McCallum is demonstrating this commitment to Ornge's core mission day in and day out.

Turning to transparency and accountability: Led by the new leadership team, Ornge has taken some very significant steps to improve transparency and accountability. First, we have a new performance agreement in place, which will provide greater accountability and oversight over Ornge. Second, in February of this year, Ornge submitted its first quality improvement plan to build on achievements of the past year. Third, Ornge has introduced several new policies and procedures, such as: a conflict-of-interest policy; a whistle-blower policy, which includes the appointments of an independent ethics officer to receive, investigate and track employee disclosures as part of this new protection plan. They've hired a patient advocate, who works with patients and their families to address concerns and also to advocate for operational improvements, and they've developed an

online patient relations portal and have guaranteed feedback to patient complaints.

Turning now to operational achievements: The Auditor General's report highlighted some significant concerns related to operations at Ornge, and I would like to speak to some of the very substantial improvements that have been undertaken through Ornge's operations over the past several months. New and improved interim medical interiors have been installed in the fleet of AW139 helicopters after extensive consultation with front-line staff. Transport Canada approval for the interior of the AW139 aircraft has also been acquired.

Steps have been taken to introduce a third line of paramedics at the Thunder Bay base to help ensure seamless 24-hour, seven-day-a-week service for northern Ontario, and dedicated flight service for the Sault Ste. Marie-to-Sudbury corridor has been created, increasing patient access to out-of-town treatment.

A pilot project in Ottawa on the use of critical care land vehicles has been launched in place of a helicopter for certain calls when deemed appropriate for patient care, and three operations divisions have been consolidated under one chief operating officer. All operational scheduling functions have now been combined into one team for improved coverage and service effectiveness. Certification material for the operations control centre has been developed and implemented.

Speaker, none of these improvements could have been possible without the complete dedication of paramedics, pilots and front-line staff. We thank them for their unwavering commitment to providing the best possible care to our families, our friends, our loved ones and our patients. I know that the minister was pleased to have heard first-hand about the impact of these improvements during her visits with the front-line staff at Ornge bases.

And now, what are these legislative changes that we're making? Mr. Speaker, these amendments are the most important thing we can do to help Ornge focus on their core mission, which is providing life-saving care to patients, now and in the future. That's why Minister Matthews has introduced proposed legislative amendments to the Ambulance Act to further entrench oversight and prevent future abuses of power at Ontario's air ambulance service.

The proposed amendments, if passed, would:

- give cabinet the power, upon the recommendation of the minister, to appoint one or more provincial representatives to the board of an air ambulance service provider;

- give the minister the power to issue directives to an air ambulance service provider;

- give the government the ability to include provisions in an agreement between Ontario and an air ambulance service provider;

- provide cabinet with the power to appoint a special investigator to investigate and report on certain activities of an air ambulance service provider;

- prohibit individuals from obstructing a special investigator or from withholding any information required by the special investigator;

—require a special investigator to provide a report to the minister upon completion of their investigation;

—provide cabinet with the power, upon the recommendation of the minister, to appoint a supervisor to exercise the powers of the board, officers and members, and other corporate powers of an air ambulance service provider;

—provide a supervisor with the same rights as the board of an air ambulance service provider. The supervisor would report to the minister;

—prohibit retaliation against a person who has disclosed information that relates to an air ambulance service provider to an inspector, investigator or special investigator. Air ambulance service providers and other persons would also be prohibited from doing anything to discourage the making of such disclosures; and

—allow the continuance of a provider of air ambulance services that is incorporated under the laws of any jurisdiction, other than Ontario, as a corporation under the Corporations Act.

Speaker, we know that it is extremely important that employees do not feel intimidated when raising any concerns. That's why our proposed amendments to the legislation would protect whistle-blowers at Ornge. In the past, we did not have the authority to make the necessary changes at Ornge when problems came to our attention. To remedy this, our proposed legislation, if passed, would allow the government to take control of Ornge in extraordinary circumstances through the appointment of a supervisor, just like we can do at the province's hospitals when trouble arises.

0930

In the past, if we needed to make changes to the government's performance agreement with Ornge, we could do so only with Ornge's consent. This was simply not feasible when changes needed to be made to protect public interest. That's why the proposed legislation would allow the government to change the performance agreement with Ornge at any time.

Now, to look back a little bit at the history of this rather troubled organization—we need to understand where we're going in the future. I think it's important for the members in this House to understand where we were and where Ornge started.

Ontario's air ambulance program was established in 1977 by the then Ministry of Health with a single aircraft based in Toronto. In essence, the service had three main elements: funding, dispatch and oversight provided by the ministry, and a base hospital system at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre. They oversaw the practice of paramedicine and air ambulance services—both helicopter and fixed wing—that were contracted out.

In June 2005, the government transferred and consolidated the air ambulance program to the Ontario Air Ambulances Services Co., known as OAA, a federally incorporated non-profit corporation.

In November 2005, our government finalized a long-term performance agreement with the OAA. It had an indefinite term and governed all aspects of air ambulance

services. The performance agreement with Ornge was then established. This agreement outlined responsibilities and expectations in the services to be delivered by Ornge; for example, base hospital, air contracting, organ recovery services and other aeromedical services and so on. It also covered compliance with: grant funding and government accounting requirements; data tracking, retention and reporting; quality assurance and education and training of flight paramedics and flight dispatch staff; a complaints and incident reporting process; documentation standards; and ministry evaluation and monitoring.

By January 2006, the OAA became responsible for all operational functions of the province's air ambulance program. In September 2006, as the newly renamed Ornge, the corporation took over the management of the air ambulance dispatch. In 2007, Ornge signed an agreement for expanded critical care fixed-wing air ambulance services, and in 2008 Ornge took over responsibility to provide critical care land ambulance services. In summary, Ornge had full control of the province's air ambulance program.

Both land and air ambulance services are governed by the Ambulance Act and regulations and standards made under the act. The act sets out the responsibilities and expectations of the minister and other parties related to the delivery of land and air ambulance and related services.

The government provides Ornge with funding, through a contractual agreement, to deliver air ambulance services as part of the minister's obligation under the Ambulance Act to fund and ensure the provision of air ambulance service. The province also provides Ornge with funding to operate the critical care land ambulance service.

Now, looking at the Auditor General's report, our government certainly thanks the Auditor General for his thorough and insightful review of Ornge. His advice has guided many of the actions that are now being undertaken to improve operations and restore confidence at Ornge.

I'm pleased that the Auditor General acknowledged that our government has—and I'm quoting from the Auditor General—"taken substantive action to address many of the issues raised in this report." We are certainly striving to move even further.

I am confident that the concerns raised by the Auditor General are being addressed through the actions that our government and Ornge have already taken and through these proposed legislative amendments. I'm very proud of our government's decisive action to address the Auditor General's recommendations to establish a new standard of accountability at Ornge and to restore Ontarians' faith in the important service it provides.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to speak a little bit more to the amended performance agreement with Ornge. Hindsight imparts perfect vision, and in hindsight it's clear that the original performance agreement with Ornge was insufficient and did not go far enough. The original performance agreement simply did not give us the power

to regularly access information from Ornge, or to verify it. The amended performance agreement raises the level of oversight far above that which is normally required of organizations receiving public funds. Under the former agreement, the past leadership was able to avoid accountability. We simply did not have the power to regularly access financial information and monitor operations at Ornge. It also became apparent that the limited operational and financial information that was provided to the ministry was insufficient and often inaccurate. The old performance agreement did not require ministry approval to create for-profit entities. In the past, Ornge also had no restrictions on assuming debt, and the old performance agreement gave us no say in major acquisitions.

Under the amended performance agreement, all of those shortcomings have been fixed. The enhanced provisions of the amended performance agreement can be grouped under two general headings: greater accountability and transparency, and the safeguarding of patient safety and care.

On accountability and transparency, the amended performance agreement raises the level of oversight with the following measures and obligations: tougher funding conditions based on key performance indicators; increased audit and inspection powers by the ministry; more detailed financial planning, monitoring, control and reporting obligations; a committee to advise the board on quality improvement initiatives; a new patient advocate and complaints process to ensure patient safety, like the one used in Ontario hospitals; mandatory public reporting of expenses, and restrictions on meals, travel and hospitality; quality improvement provisions that link executive compensation to performance improvement targets in an annual quality plan; and mandatory approval by the minister for any changes to Ornge's corporate structure or the sale of assets by Ornge.

On safeguarding patient care and safety, the auditor also highlighted some concerns around dispatch and response times for air and critical care land ambulances, which our government took very seriously. The amended performance agreement places a much greater emphasis on performance standards and requires increased reporting of dispatch information, including cancelled and declined air and land ambulance calls. The performance agreement is closely aligned with the Excellent Care for All Act, which guides the province's hospitals. Quality improvement and key performance indicators are now linked to both Ornge's funding and executive compensation. To ensure patient safety remains paramount, Ornge has created a new patient advocate and a new formalized complaints process which is publicly posted and which ensures patient safety similar to what we have in our hospitals.

The amended performance agreement also deals with enhancing the quality of Ornge's services based on objective, evidence-based performance indicators. Under the terms of this agreement, the minister's approval is required for any changes to Ornge's corporate structure, including the sale of assets. It also requires detailed fi-

nancial planning, monitoring and control, and reporting obligations to increase accountability.

9940

The new agreement also ensures compliance with the Public Sector Salary Disclosure Act and the Broader Public Sector Accountability Act. It increases audit and inspection powers by the ministry and introduces debt control provisions to prevent debt increases that do not have ministry approval.

In addition, the performance agreement also provides for tougher funding conditions based on key performance indicators, and a committee to advise the board on quality improvement initiatives.

We are pleased that an amended performance agreement is in place. It represents a critical step towards an improved air ambulance system.

To conclude, I'd like to take a moment to address each and every member of this House. The amendments that our government is proposing today, coupled with the improvements at Ornge that have already been made, will entrench accountability and transparency at Ornge, as well as restore the public's confidence in our air ambulance services.

I am completely confident that every member of this Legislature, regardless of political stripe, can support these amendments. I know that each and every one of us wants to ensure that public dollars are spent appropriately and responsibly and are subject to the strictest scrutiny possible. I also know that every one of us wants to ensure the highest possible standard for patient care across our great province. These proposed amendments will not only ensure that we meet these goals; they will ensure a culture of continual improvement for years to come.

I'd like to say to each and every one of my colleagues that supporting these amendments is the single most important thing we can do. I know that these proposed amendments represent a significant common ground between our parties and our communities.

There is no question that the new leadership and the front-line staff continue to do their utmost to deliver safe, reliable air ambulance services. They are putting their full efforts towards their core mission of providing life-saving care to Ontario patients. I'd like to echo the minister's sentiments and thank the dedicated paramedics, pilots and front-line staff at Ornge, who work so hard every day to save lives.

I am confident that the auditor's advice, combined with the actions that we are taking, as well as the amendments we are proposing today, will contribute to a better air ambulance service and the highest standard of care for all Ontarians.

I sincerely hope that every member of this House will agree that our proposed legislative changes are necessary and that they will support these proposed amendments. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I was listening to the minister in her remarks earlier, as well as the member from Oak

Ridges-Markham. I want to put on the record that I'm very pleased with the member from Oak Ridges-Markham, and I'll tell you why. She's a medical doctor. Minister Matthews is a PhD doctor, and quite a bright lady, I guess. But I'm surprised that the member from Oak Ridges-Markham isn't in cabinet. With the talent that she brings to that file—

Hon. James J. Bradley: You're just being mischievous.

Mr. John O'Toole: No, I'm trying to stay as neutral as possible. The remarks on this bill—

Hon. James J. Bradley: You have to be sincere in your remarks in here.

Mr. John O'Toole: They are sincere remarks, for sure, because I did speak with her and I've watched her over the years. I'll leave that alone there.

I want to also, out of respect for our member—Christine Elliott, our critic, spoke in response to the minister introducing Bill 11 the other day and, I think, summed up quite categorically our position on this bill. The bill was introduced, as people would know, in the last session, before Premier McGuinty resigned and prorogued the House.

But I can only say as well that our members on this side—Frank Klees being the lead on this when it was in committee—have the highest respect for the front-line people in the Ornge organization, some of whom were so disheartened and displeased with the shenanigans that were going on.

But even if I look at the paper today, there's another article about Chris Mazza. How disheartening is that? He was given a payoff whereas another doctor's career has now been decimated. I don't say that to characterize these people. They were probably encouraged by the government to be involved in those sorts of things of money. He apparently made about \$1.6 million, if you can imagine.

So there's a lot to be said on this bill, which I'll reserve for my remarks in the future.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments? The member for Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, wanted to thank the minister for being there in the first hour of this bill, and I appreciated that she started her talk with thank yous to the front-line staff. They've had it tough; they've had it really tough. If you think of the number of paramedics, the number of pilots, the number of staff at Ornge that knew things were wrong—they tried their best within the confines of Ornge to ring the alarm bells, but nobody was listening. Then they started to blow the whistle and go to the Ministry of Health and tell them—for weeks, for months, for years they were telling the ministry, "Things are not good at Ornge. People are using money in ways they shouldn't be using money. Services are not improving in quality; they are going down, going down quickly."

There were corporations being formed for the reason of hiding monies and nothing else, but it didn't matter how many times they went to the ministry, how many

times they went to the minister's staff, how many times they rang the alarm bells, it always ended the same way: Those employees lost their jobs. Employees got punished; employees were put through the wringer, and the ministry never, never moved. They never used any of the accountability methods that they had, they did not use any of the oversight mechanisms that were open to them; they never looked into transparency. So, yes, for all of you that have lost your jobs, that have had a tough time, thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Phil McNeely: I'm happy to speak to An Act to amend the Ambulance Act with respect to air ambulance services, the minister's address and also the member for Oak Ridges-Markham, who presented the case for Bill 11 and how it should be taken forward so quickly.

The air ambulance issue started—I think Dr. Mazza was with it in 1997 or 1998-99, in that time. He came in and it was established in 2003, and it continued as an air ambulance service that was not satisfactory. The Auditor General got in there; when his report came out, we had the minister taking action. And we've seen since 2011, around Christmas when the OPP went in and the minister before that, a big change in the air ambulance. We see that the report on how it is operating—they are dealing, and the new management team is dealing with all the issues that were raised during the public accounts hearings, hearing from the Auditor General and hearing from countless people who worked within Ornge and worked outside of Ornge as consultants.

The minister has taken the steps necessary. This bill is extremely important to reinforce the air ambulance, to put in the same provisions as the Excellent Care for All Act in health care and to make this operate like a hospital, with the same oversight and transparency. All those issues have been very quickly brought forward. We have a management team in place. We need this Bill 11, and I just ask all members here to support it.

0950

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I rise today to address what we heard with regard to this bill. Unfortunately, just in the headlines today proof has shown that the story continues.

When we look back to last year, when this piece of legislation was introduced for debate, it was cobbled together in haste. It was to provide cover for the lack of capacity that the Ministry of Health and the minister had with regard to this horrible, horrible event whereby we had an executive totally misusing Ontario taxpayer dollars. It's a travesty. There was absolutely no oversight, as my friend from Burlington mentioned.

We need to take a look at how to do things better, and that's why our caucus feels very, very strongly that we need to continue to examine what went wrong, because enough is enough. Ontario taxpayers deserve so much better. When you hear that there's an executive spending

literally double digits on a bottle of water, taking trips across the world on the taxpayers' back, it goes to show that this oversight—this ministry has been totally benign and turned a blind eye to the issues at hand.

You know what? In rural Ontario, when we're seeing hospitals crumble, when we see election promises broken—the list goes on and on and on—you just have to shake your head, because this whole Ornge fiasco has been a totally mismanaged affair. Those dollars could have gone so far in terms of addressing health care across this province. We need to do better.

Another esteemed college of mine mentioned: Where does the buck stop? Well, ladies and gentlemen of the House, it has to stop now. We can't let minimal legislation provide a cover-up.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Oak Ridges—Markham, you have two minutes to respond.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and to those who have responded to the minister's and my remarks. First of all, to my neighbour from Durham, I always appreciate your compliments and I accept them at face value.

To the member from Nickel Belt, I too share with you the concern for paramedics. In my position as commissioner of health services for York region, I was charged with the responsibility for, in fact, amalgamating the six land ambulance services we had in York region into one publicly funded and publicly delivered service in York region, when the former government downloaded land ambulance to upper-tier municipalities. I'm extremely proud of York region EMS.

To my colleague from Ottawa—Orléans, who clearly has been very involved with the public accounts committee previously and now, I think what we're talking about here is definitely moving forward on proposed legislative amendments. We on this side of the House are as distressed as the rest of the members as to what occurred at Ornge and we are determined that we put in place mechanisms so that agencies or arm's-length bodies—this was, of course, a federal corporation—do have the type of oversight so that they are charged with their fiduciary responsibility to the taxpayer in a way that we can ensure that it is maintained.

To the member from Huron—Bruce: The stories continue but the actions have stopped. As soon as the minister was aware of the findings of the Auditor General, it is absolutely clear that she took immediate steps to look into the situation at Ornge and to take remedial steps.

This proposed legislation is needed. I urge everyone to support it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to have the opportunity, on behalf of Tim Hudak and the opposition, to address Bill 11, An Act to amend the Ambulance Act with respect to air ambulance services. I'm very pleased to have this opportunity and hopefully will have enough time to make all the remarks that I want to make.

This bill was introduced and debated to a very limited extent in the last session of the Legislature under Premier McGuinty. Now, in context—I don't want to be offensive to anyone—we start by saying that people working in Ornge ambulance and those trying to make the system work are to be respected. What was missing was the governance model set up by Premier McGuinty. That's really what was missing.

I'm quite surprised—I look back at the history of Dr. Chris Mazza. He was a highly regarded medical person—absolutely no experience at all in the helicopter and that side of the business. There were other people that should have been appointed. At least, that's my understanding. I'm surprised now that we're introducing a bill again when public accounts—the Auditor General hasn't really put together the final report. I think it would have been important to finish off those hearings and then come up with a report that was a consensus.

I'm sure our leader, Tim Hudak, was trying to do the right thing, as our critic Christine Elliott said as well. I believe that the NDP—and I have great respect for the member from Nickel Belt, I believe it is; I believe that she's a highly regarded member here. Their input at these committees would have served well to build the consensus that Premier Kathleen Wynne is trying to portray, shall I say, portraying it now with the teachers by promising them some payoff at the end of the day.

When I look at this Ornge ambulance thing, I have correspondence in my possession that was brought to my attention. Now, I'll relate this as a story, one of the pieces of how poorly the system of setting up Ornge worked. There was a company in Peterborough that had been in contact with Chris Mazza and Ornge, and this company was expert in the interior dimensions and in building and designing the interiors of helicopters and ambulances. The company was more or less given the brush-off, and I have the correspondence. I'm going to share it with Frank Klees in committee.

The company wrote to Mr. Leal, now Minister Leal, from Peterborough. In fairness to Mr. Leal, Mr. Leal did write to the minister. I think it was David Caplan at the time, who has since resigned.

Hon. James J. Bradley: —some pictures.

Mr. John O'Toole: In fact, there are a couple of pictures. The Minister of the Environment is chirping in there.

But the point I'm saying is that the minister responded back to Mr. Leal, and said that there was a process. It was put up on the purchasing website for bidding on projects. The person went through all the application and all this kind of stuff and still was not even responded to. So, out of frustration, they wrote a rather technical letter. When I read it, I thought, "Gosh. This is a small business in Ontario being brushed aside." No political connections at all: That was the problem. No connections, the inside. He should have gone to a couple of the fundraisers.

Here's the deal: Eventually, the business went to Italy. None of the helicopters were properly suited for the delivery of the service. In fact, they bought extra heli-

copters thinking they could make money on them. Those two helicopters are still in storage, and paying rent, maintenance and the rest, because air equipment can't just sit around in some warehouse.

Honest to God, in this whole fiasco I believe in fact it's important for the viewers to know that the minister already had the authority to intervene on the independent health facilities legislation. This excuse of—I can't use the word "cover-up," so I won't, but the issue was that this was a way of getting around the responsibilities of the cabinet itself. Once again, in its own case, one could overlook or accept the apology of the minister, which I don't think she ever did. It's the same minister, by the way. But when you look at the context of what was going on in eHealth, the same ministry is fraught with unaccountability and lack of transparency and the waste of taxpayers' money, money that's denying children treatment for autism. It's denying people that have cancer the proper drugs. That waste of money is really, at the end of the day, what's most disconcerting.

1000

Whether or not the lawyer language, both in this bill or the debates that will go on—what about the patients? What about the young person who had an accident at the side of the road where the ambulance couldn't accommodate the patient on transfer? The patient was transferred by land ambulance. There were several cases cited during the hearings in public accounts and others. Mr. Klees did a marvellous job, along with, I believe, the Toronto Star, in bringing this to light. At the end of the day, the real casualties here are the families and the individuals whose lives were put at risk, with no sense of compassion or caring from the government of the day. They were busy trying to put out the fires around the air ambulance and the fires around the gas plants that they were moving or not moving, and all of the other inquiries that were ongoing.

To me, this bill here—I put to the minister, because the minister's here, that really, I think starting off with a humble apology is not an admission of guilt, but it would be a good way to start to build bridges. I honestly think that she probably would like to do that.

But I want to refer back to my colleague from Huron-Bruce, who said that the story's not over. In fact, in the Toronto Star—the viewer today, I want you to read the Toronto Star. It's on A1, so it's a lead story. Here's just a little bit of the disintegration or—I don't want to say "corruption," because that's not a very nice word either. Here's what it said: Founder Chris Mazza was paid, "\$256,000 in public money—with no proof Mazza did some of the work" he was paid to do. Not only that, it goes on to say that, "Over a similar period of time, Mount Sinai paid Mazza \$256,000." This other person he was working with was Mount Sinai's Dr. Stewart, who was paid "roughly \$75,000 annually over seven years (a total of \$436,000) to advise Mazza and Ornge on medical issues—work that the air ambulance firm's new managers said they could not confirm was done because the relationship was primarily between Mazza and Stewart."

There's a transfer of a quarter of a million annually between two people with no work being done. Now, I'm not an investigator, but there's a case of \$265,000 for nothing. It's sinful. It's more than just criminal; it's sinful.

If you go on in this article—and I commend the Star. It's been quite a good lead on this article. Usually I don't read the paper, but sometimes I have to. "Between 2009 and 2011, Mount Sinai paid Mazza \$148,000 'for a variety of advisory services to the critical care response team and the department of medicine.'"

Now, there's no doubt that Dr. Chris Mazza once was a very compelling doctor. I think what happened is the leadership group, i.e., the Ministry of Health and the minister herself, made it very clear: "Just get it done. Here's a box full of money." And they did. They took the box full of money and they went to Italy and spent a lot of it.

Here's the deal: I know first-hand that in one of the quiet private lakes in my riding there's a very expensive Ornge boat that was part of the organization.

Mrs. Jane McKenna: Really?

Mr. John O'Toole: Yes, it was one of those high racing boats. Two motorcycles, one of which I believe was auctioned off—this kind of evidence, and I can't believe for a moment that somehow we're all hushed up here; it's something we shouldn't be talking about or be critical about. There's the evidence, and if it was an ordinary person, not connected, they'd be in jail. I go back to first principles here.

On top of that, there was another case—and the member from Nickel Belt probably will tell the story. In northern Ontario there was an accident that occurred. There was an air rescue called for. At the end of the day, they had to take the individual by land ambulance, and I think they may have perished on the way. I think all of this glitz and glamour with the helicopters and the fancy headquarters and the \$1.9 million, all this kind of stuff is a distraction. They didn't get the job done. We still talk about health care as if—and there are still problems in health care. Every hospital, almost, is in an operating deficit. They're cutting off nurses, and they're—honest to God, the whole file is in a mess, and it's the number one part of the budget; 50% of the entire budget is health care.

I want to say at this point in time that I want to share my time, because I'm not the lead on this. I want to share my time with Christine Elliott, probably.

Hon. James J. Bradley: She was in the photograph.

Mr. John O'Toole: Well, Christine Elliott was—we actually were quite co-operative as members. We were working with—the city of Oshawa wanted Ornge to be one of the bases. Had we known all this corruption was underneath it all, we would have been taking pictures and sending them to the Premier.

I myself did attend, and tried to—with Christine Elliott, who's a highly regarded figure in Durham region—out of respect for making this work. We weren't there for political reasons. We were there to actually endorse the city

of Oshawa's bid to host the air ambulance station. In fact, when they closed the station for air ambulance, I believe it was—what was the other one in west Toronto? The other airport that closed.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: Buttonville.

Mr. John O'Toole: Buttonville. Oshawa was the logical recipient of the business. So on that basis alone—and Mr. Bradley says that we—we were there to endorse our community, as you would in St. Catharines. You'd be there as well.

In fact, Christine Elliott is a beautiful, talented person and a beautiful, talented representative from the riding of Whitby, and a great critic. To me, she said rather respectfully—I was looking through her remarks, and she said here, “What’s even more troubling is, the legislation was put together before the public accounts committee heard from all the relevant witnesses and before we understood what the conditions were that led up to this air ambulance mess at Ornge.... How can you possibly expect to develop a piece of legislation when you don’t really even know what the problem is yet? And this is, despite the amendments—that’s what this amendment bill is purporting to do.”

Now, the clearest thing—we support certain aspects of the bill. Certainly, our leader has been talking about the whistle-blower protection from the very beginning. That’s part of transparency and accountability. So there’s a section. But there are issues in here which exempts the member—the minister, in fact—from any accountability.

I think, quite honestly, to me—it’s getting very close to quitting time here, and I don’t want to use up all the time on Christine or Jim Flaherty.

It has been less than a year since Christine stood in the House and pointed out that nothing really has changed. The same thing exists today. The story goes on. In the Toronto Star this morning, I see “Top Doctor Quits Amid Ornge Scandal.” The scandal continues, despite all of the protestations and the remarks.

At the end of the day, I put on the table this: I believe that patients are still at risk, and that’s until we apologize and have almost a full inquiry. Now, I don’t think that’s going to happen. Do you know why? Because right now we have so much evidence on the two gas plants that there’s been a call for a select committee. Every question has been asked to the minister and to the Premier, and it—

Hon. James J. Bradley: It was offered. You turned it down.

Mr. John O'Toole: Minister Bradley, from St. Catharines, is saying that it was turned down, because there were conditions—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I would ask the member to stick to the topic that is being debated, rather than drifting off.

Mr. John O'Toole: Thank you. The issue there was that the contempt motion was supposed to be withdrawn as a condition to having the select committee.

But we still are going ahead with the committee, and the hearings aren’t finished. If you tie the pieces together

here—why, in this bill, why on earth would they not have listened to the comments and public input and explanations by the staff, some of the staff, having the protection of whistle-blower and coming forward and—remember, Mr. Speaker, the point of all of this is, and our leader, Tim Hudak, has said this many times: Let’s put the patient first. Pretty much what he was saying yesterday in the opposition day motion on education is put the student first, not the union leaders.

And so they’ve got it wrong. The Working Families paid money for Ms. Wynne to meet with them. Now, this morning in the paper, the front headlines here: \$5,000.

1010

Hon. James J. Bradley: Well, Tim Hudak had one of those.

Mr. John O'Toole: That doesn’t make it right.

Here’s the deal. Here’s what it says: “Dinner with Wynne Worth \$5,000.” What’s the price of getting this right? What’s the price, for the people of Ontario, of making sure we get the gas plant right? What’s the price of accountability?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I would ask the member one more time to debate the bill that’s in front of us.

Mr. John O'Toole: What’s the price of admission here? What’s the price of admission? Why would we be paying—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I’ve provided you with one warning. I would like you to debate the bill that’s in front of us rather than stray.

Mr. John O'Toole: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I will try. I get so emotionally entangled in this. There are so many scandals going on that you almost have to have a scorecard. But I will stick to it.

What’s the price for getting this right? That’s what I’m trying to leave with the members today. Let’s put down the swords and the accusations and try to focus on the patient. Let’s put the inquiry back on track, led by Frank Klees and others, and let’s have the public talk to us about this and teach us a little bit about putting patients first. My intent this morning is not to delve into certain aspects of the bill that sort of encourage more transparency and accountability and more protection. Assigning the minister the ability to put in a supervisor—that should be an ongoing relationship. Health care is half the budget. It’s half of the \$120-some billion, and this province is borrowing most of that money. Right now our operating deficit—even Don Drummond said quite honestly that we have a structural deficit, and I don’t see any bright lights on the horizon. Health care is very dependent on having a strong economy.

Now, if you look at the paper today, Mr. Speaker—this does relate to the inability to fix this problem without the money—there’s a bunch of high school teachers being laid off in Toronto. Why? It’s the same issue with the health care problems: not enough money. I hear in health care there’s broader—exemptions for access to certain medications. Now there’s wait-lists for certain treatments. All of this relates back to the minister who,

quite frankly—I don't say this in any personal way; I want this very clear now. All the time, there's the member from Oak Ridges—Markham, who was the medical officer of health for York region, sitting on the back-bench, reading some prepared speech when she could be taking the lead in the Ministry of Health. I put that one of the ways here to show some contriteness is to ask Minister Matthews to take another portfolio and have the member from Oak Ridges—Markham sort of take over, clean slate. I'm sure that the opposition would be more than accommodating in trying to work with the new minister. The minister has to at least say she's sorry or apologize or say, "Look, I didn't know what I was doing. It happened when I wasn't paying attention. I was looking at the issues going on in eHealth, trying to get that to work." The diabetes registry is not even working. They've spent billions of dollars on trying to get the electronic health records, and in fact, it's shameful.

Honest to God, I think it's shameful, but at the end of the day, I really believe—

Mr. Jim Wilson: Didn't you split your time with Klees?

Mr. John O'Toole: Yes, I have, yes. I've split my time with Frank Klees and I knew for sure that he would prefer to be making—he will be making the technical remarks; I've been making the generalized remarks—

Hon. James J. Bradley: The partisan attacks.

Mr. John O'Toole: No, the generalized remarks—about trying to tie wasteful, scandalous spending in Ornge, in eHealth, in gas plants to this one issue. Let's try and solve this issue.

I do suggest that they should proceed with haste in the public accounts committee on the Ornge hearings. I believe that Ms. Wynne, the Premier of Ontario, said that she'll appear before the gas plant hearing. I think she was in the very same cabinet that dealt with some of these scandalous outcomes of Ornge, and she should probably appear before that committee too. Not only that, she's not—Mr. Speaker, I don't believe that the Premier, with her responsibilities in agriculture, is going to have enough—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you very much.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Seeing the time on the clock, this House stands recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Steve Clark: It gives me great pleasure to introduce a guest in the west members' gallery: Robert Koci, who is editor of Canadian Contractor magazine. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I'm here to stand to welcome all of those—and there are many in the galleries—who came

to witness the release of Campaign 2000's report on child poverty.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I'm joined today by, in the east members' gallery, two people from Oakville. They've joined us to see how the Legislature works. Please welcome Carie Reed and Alaina Tennison.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Please join me in welcoming Cathy Jonker. She is the mother of a page, A.J., and I'm happy that she's able to join us at Queen's Park today.

Miss Monique Taylor: It's my pleasure today to welcome my aunt-in-law, Ms. Cathy Bozzo, to the House, and to also welcome Tom Cooper, who is here on behalf of Campaign 2000 and is from the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction—and the other members.

Hon. Reza Moridi: It's my pleasure to welcome the family of page Jenna Hirji of Richmond Hill, sitting in the gallery: Tazim Hirji, Habiba Hirji, Gulzar Hirji and Adam Hirji. Please welcome them.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: I'd like to welcome some contractors visiting from Northumberland—Quinte West this morning: Michael and Esther Schuilenberg, Joe Dibbits and Frank Bremen. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: It is my great pleasure and honour to welcome, in the west members' gallery, for the first time to view live question period, my best friend, the love of my life, the mother of my children: my wife, Jenny.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That'll get you points.

The member for Scarborough—Agincourt.

Ms. Soo Wong: I want to welcome two students from my riding of Scarborough—Agincourt, Terah Bakerathan and Fiza Malik, and their teacher, Denise Colby, from the Girls' Leadership Academy. They are going to be the junior MPP for the day. Welcome.

Hon. Teresa Piruzza: Please join me in welcoming a couple of my friends from the Windsor-Essex area: Mr. Garry Fortune and Kim Lewis. Mr. Lewis is the chair and CEO of Liquiforce. Good morning and welcome.

Mr. Frank Klees: I have the privilege of welcoming students from Sacred Heart Catholic School in Newmarket this morning. They're making their way up to the gallery and will be observing question period today. With them is Mr. Vic DiGiovanni; he is a grade 12 politics teacher. Ms. Jocelyn Roberts's grade 10 civics class will be joining them, and Ms. Alice Boyle's ESL class will be joining us. They're looking forward to seeing how business is done here in the Legislature, and they're looking forward to ministers answering the questions that members of the opposition will be putting to them.

Mr. Randy Hillier: It's my pleasure today to welcome hundreds of contractors from across Ontario to the "Fix the WSIB" rally. I'd like to make special mention of a few people that are here joining us in both the west members' gallery and in the public galleries who have been instrumental in helping to fix the WSIB: Juliette Forques, Marc Brisson, Walter Pamic, Justin Dokter, Roger Tickner; Steve Hamilton and Joe Vaccaro from the Ontario Home Builders' Association; Doug Leitch and

Steve Sell from the Ontario Electrical League; Plamen Petkov from the CFIB; and all those hundreds of others who are here to help us out in democracy.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): On behalf of the Minister of Finance, the member for Mississauga South, regarding page Jessica Seifried: mother Kathryn, father Edward, sister Julia and godmother Cynthia Seebach are here visiting as well. Welcome.

I would also like to introduce the former member for Brantford, in the 32nd and 33rd House, Mr. Phil Gillies. Welcome.

Interjection: He was a progressive.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I will reserve comment to a later date.

Another introduction?

Mr. Randy Hillier: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Point of order, member?

Mr. Randy Hillier: Speaker, today I seek unanimous consent that in order to expedite the process for the hundreds of contractors who are here today, they be allowed to wear their work-related apparel in the Legislature today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member has asked for unanimous consent to wear their material. Is it agreed? I heard a “no.”

It is now time for oral questions.

ORAL QUESTIONS

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Victor Fedeli: My question is for the Premier. Today in your scrum and in the justice committee, you and your Liberal colleagues admitted that there are more gas plant documents. The mere premise that you are asking for more proves that you have been withholding documents you've been ordered to release.

Contrary to your gracious offer to look for more documents, Premier, we actually don't need your permission. You were ordered to turn over all the documents, and by “all documents,” we mean all documents. You don't need a new directive, Premier; you just need to comply with the Speaker.

Premier, will you just release all the documents now?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Just to be clear—and I know the House leader is eager to jump in on this—the member opposite needs to understand the scope of previous requests. The May 2012 motion only requested documents from the Minister of Energy, the Ministry of Energy and the Ontario Power Authority. What I did this morning was, I said that I thought it was appropriate that the justice committee would have the opportunity to ask for documents from across government.

So actually, Mr. Speaker, what I did this morning was to suggest that the justice committee, as the mechanism that was chosen by the opposition, should be able to do

what, in effect, a select committee would have been able to do and ask all those questions and get all the documents that I thought the member opposite was interested in seeing.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Premier, you now form the four corners of this scandal. You were in the cabinet when these decisions were rendered. You were the campaign co-chair when Liberal operatives cancelled the Mississauga plant. You are now the leader of the Liberal Party and the Premier of Ontario. You can't run, you can't hide from this, and you can't spin your way out of this mess.

You have admitted to us that this was a political decision, yet you've offered all the documents from your ministries. But will you order your Liberal Party to release all the campaign documents of this terrible scandal?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think we've agreed in this Legislature that this was a political decision. It was a political decision that was made by a government after a campaign. It was a political decision that both other parties said they were going to make if they formed government, Mr. Speaker. The Liberal Party won, and we acted on that political promise that we had made during a campaign.

1040

I have said consistently that I am open to making sure that all the documentation is available. That's what my announcement this morning was about; that's what the unanimous consent motion will be about.

I think that if the committee wants to ask for other documents from parties—they can ask from the Liberal Party, if they want to ask for information from the Conservative Party and from the NDP—they can ask for all of that information. They actually did need the motion in order to be able to do that.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It's really not helpful when the question is being asked and somebody is still saying from the same side—yelling out, and, when somebody is answering, somebody from the same side yelling out, because it becomes a little more difficult for me to do my job when I want to tell somebody to be quiet over here when somebody's heckling on this side when the answer or the question is being put. So, please refrain.

Final supplementary.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Premier, I realize you'd rather be talking about anything other than this gas plant scandal. We can see why; you're in pretty deep in this one, Premier. Look what happened last time you spoke. You said, “All of the documents that have been released are the documents that were available.” Even when you knew we did not have the Oakville Project Vapour documents at that time, you said that.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of the Environment, come to order.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Now you've admitted, after three document dumps, that you still haven't released all the documents. Ontarians need a Premier who will tell them the facts, unprovoked. Today proves you're not that Premier.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I didn't hear a question in that, but I'm just going to answer anyway.

Mr. Speaker, I really hope that the Progressive Conservatives will support the motion that we put forward today; I really hope that they will. Just to be clear on what I have asked today: I have asked my House leader to work with the opposition to broaden the mandate of the justice committee to look at the tendering, planning, commissioning, cancellation and relocation of the Mississauga and Oakville gas plants. The reason I've done that is that, as you know, last year's request for gas plant documents pertained only to the Ministry of Energy, the Minister of Energy and the Ontario Power Authority.

So, Mr. Speaker, quite the opposite to what the member opposite is saying, I am working as hard as I can to make sure that all of the information is available and that the justice committee has the mandate to access all of that information.

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. Peter Shurman: Premier, you appointed a finance minister who, like me, has a significant background in private sector business. In private business, he knows and I know that there are controls on spending or it is goodbye. We also know that salaries, the largest cost to the province, are key, and that unions talk about levelling the playing field, about doing well for their union members. So what happens when that playing field tilts the other way, when it favours unions on the public's back? My experience and Mr. Sousa's experience in former actions are, you exercise control or you're out. I'd expect you to agree with that, Premier.

So we have a new hiring elite in our public sector, and it's your finance minister's job to control that. I know you'd agree.

Your government has frozen non-union wages so you're on board with the principle of freezing wages to control costs. Will you support collaboratively our conclusion that we need a two-year breather? Will you support my legislation, Bill 5, for a two-year mandatory wage freeze?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I won't. We've always been clear that there is no room for a wage increase. We've been working with our public sector partners to implement that; we've negotiated agreements with AMAPCEO, with the OMA and with OPSEU. We have had good results in working in partnership with our public sector partners, and I think that that is the course for us going forward. We've been very clear: There is no

room for a wage increase. We're having success in negotiating those agreements, and we're going to continue on that path.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Shurman: With respect, that is not an answer to Ontarians, Premier. Most people know what has to be done when the money just isn't there, and the StatsCan figures used by the Fraser Institute and CFIB don't lie. Government workers have five times the job security, 76% of them have pension plans versus only 25% in the private sector, and salaries are about 14% better in government. So if unions are correct and we need to actually level the playing field and if we're desperate to balance a budget, why won't you admit that a two-year wage freeze is fair and just and completely in order?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: What the member opposite is arguing for is an outcome. He's arguing that there should be wage constraint. We are making the same argument. We have different methodologies to get there, but the outcome has to be the same.

I agree that we need wage constraint. That's why we've been on the path that we've been on for the last year. That's why we have negotiated the zero-zero agreements that we have negotiated. We are working to the same goal, but we are not going to use the same mechanism as the member opposite is suggesting, because we really believe that working in partnership, working with the public sector employees, we can get there, and we're demonstrating that that's possible.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Peter Shurman: This is somewhat frustrating. The Premier has seen first-hand what happens when you continue on a path of reckless spending. I ran a small business for 10 years; a larger business longer than that. I thought you were a reasonable and fair person. She is stonewalling, Speaker, on a pressing issue, and she knows it. When I stand on that side of this chamber with a Tim Hudak government, we'll control spending and there will be a level playing field.

So, back to the Premier: Is it so important to buy union peace that you will continue on a path to destruction? If you are not prepared to support our wage freeze bill, it is imperative that you explain right here and right now what you intend to do to save \$2 billion a year that you desperately need. Please do that.

Applause.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The reality is—oh, they've got to do their standing ovation.

Mr. Speaker, the reality is that we are on track to balance the budget by 2017-18. We said that was the plan. We have overachieved our targets for the last three years. We're ahead of schedule on that balanced budget target. So, contrary to what the member opposite is saying, we have found a way to constrain wages. We will continue to do that.

The other issue is that we wanted to introduce some changes and some transparency to the interest arbitration

process, because that's one of the issues that I know the party opposite has raised. They took those mechanisms out of the budget; they took those mechanisms that would have put more transparency in place in interest arbitration out of the budget. If we reintroduce those, I hope that the party opposite will support them.

POWER PLANTS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. Last fall, a legislative committee asked for documents related to the cancellation of private power contracts for gas plants in Mississauga and Oakville. My question to the Premier is a simple one: Does she really think that process worked well?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think what I did today was to ask that we broaden the mandate of the committee so that the committee could ask for all of the documentation across government. It's the exact reason that I gave this morning, because I think that the justice committee should have the mandate to ask a broader range of questions and that all that information should be available, and could in fact have the effect of a select committee. That's exactly why I asked my House leader to work with the opposition this morning, to find a way to broaden that mandate.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, here's what people saw: The private power deals were cancelled for partisan purposes. The cost to the public was buried until after the election campaign, and when the government was finally compelled by committee to release information, the public watched as the government released documents, insisted that everything had been disclosed and then released more, and insisted again that everything had been disclosed and then released more again. Does the Premier think this is a process that works?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I want the process to change. I want the questions to be broader. I want all the information to be available. That's why I made my statement this morning. That's why I've asked the House leader to work with the opposition to broaden the mandate of the justice committee.

Part of the problem with the process up to this point is that the mandate has been narrow. So, documents from the Ministry of Energy, the Minister of Energy and the Ontario Power Authority were all that were available. I have said clearly, I don't think that's broad enough. I think that we need to broaden the search, we need to broaden the questioning, and that's why I've asked the House leader to work with the opposition to do that.

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The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: While we appreciate the government's intention to bring forward a motion to expand the powers of the committee, there's some well-earned skepticism about the committee's ability to get to the bottom of this.

We've proposed a much better alternative: Take this issue away from the Legislature and send it to an affordable public inquiry so we can focus on creating jobs, we can focus on improving health care, and we can focus on making life more affordable for the people of this province, here in this chamber.

Will the Premier reconsider her opposition to our simple proposal?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I understand the reason that the leader of the third party has added the word "affordable" in front of "public inquiry," but I think that it is a contradiction in terms. I think that we have the mechanisms within the legislative process to get to the bottom of this, but I think that those mechanisms can be improved.

I had suggested a select committee; the Legislature chose the justice committee. So what I've said is, let's broaden the mandate of the justice committee. Let's give them the mandate to ask all of the questions around all of the issues surrounding these decisions, because I want us to know how to avoid having this kind of situation in the future. Siting energy infrastructure is a very complicated process, and I want to make sure we understand what happened, where we went wrong. We need to make sure that we find a way to avoid this kind of situation in the future.

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also to the Premier. The Liberal government decided in 2010 that auto insurance companies needed a break, and so they changed the rules to help those companies save over \$2 billion a year. The Premier said that she wants to combat fraud, which will save them even more money.

I guess my question to the Premier is, at what point do drivers deserve a break in their auto insurance rates?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The leader of the third party is right that over our term, we have made a lot of changes in the auto insurance industry. When we first came into office in 2003, there were many changes that were made that actually reduced—I think at one point, if my memory serves me, there was an 11% reduction across the board in auto insurance premiums. They have gone up again and there is more work to be done, although they went down slightly last year.

I have said repeatedly that I want to work with the third party on this issue, I think we do need to work with the industry. We need to implement the recommendations of the Auto Insurance Anti-Fraud Task Force, to make sure that whatever fraud is in the system, we can get it out, and the money, the savings there need to be passed on to the premium holders.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Tomorrow I'm going to be meeting with the Insurance Bureau of Canada and I'm going to be keeping my ears open for good ideas. But I am going to be clear with those folks: My goal is to see insurance premiums drop by 15%, and I'm frankly not all

that interested in working together unless drivers actually get a break, a break that they've been waiting for, for far too long in this province.

Will the Premier back our efforts or will she keep backing a status quo that keeps leaving people paying more and more and more for their insurance rates?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'm not big on the status quo in this instance. I think that there are improvements that need to be made. To that end, actually, last year I had a panel of people from the industry—brokers, the insurance bureau and folks who deal with this issue on a daily basis. I had many of my constituents come and talk to them about not just the issues of fraud, but some of the other issues of geographic distribution of premium rates and so on.

I know that there are a lot of issues that we need to talk about on this front, and I am absolutely willing to engage both with the industry and the third party on this issue.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: If the Premier went through a panel process this last year, I don't know why the heck the rates still keep going up. She certainly can't seem to get to the action. A lot of talk; no action.

I know the Premier is going to be in the Soo tomorrow. Nancy Bailey lives there, and she wrote to us to say that even with no accidents, her rates keep increasing. She says it's "making it impossible for some people to even use a car."

Ronda wrote, saying, "[R]ates generally go up every year with the insurer I currently use. I contact them to try to understand why, but am always left with vague answers.... Insurance companies are some of the richest corporations in the country ... yet rates continue to climb."

These women deserve some answers. The Premier has made life a hell of a lot better—sorry; excuse me. I withdraw that.

The Premier has made life a heck of a lot better for insurance companies. When will she make life more affordable for the drivers in Sault Ste. Marie and the rest of Ontario?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): In this case, I appreciate the member taking care of herself.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Initiative.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, overall insurance rates went down very slightly last year. But I do not deny that this is an issue, which is why I have said consistently that there is money, I believe, to be found in the system. I think implementing the anti-fraud task force report—their recommendations—is a very important step that we have to take.

But the associated issue there is that there has to be a conversation with the industry that ties those reductions to premium reductions, as a result of the implementation

of the recommendations, and that's the piece I want to work on with the leader of the third party.

I'm happy to have that conversation. I, too, will be sitting down with the industry. The Minister of Finance will be sitting down with the industry. We need to find a way through this, because there are real needs and people are struggling with the costs of auto insurance. I absolutely accept that and look forward to working with the member on it.

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. Jeff Yurek: My question is to the Premier. Talking about the dismal state of our province's finances yesterday, your finance minister said there are a couple of things to put in perspective. Then he said, "We have now reduced our spending dramatically."

Premier, your government hasn't reduced spending at all. In fact, you're spending more than the previous government ever. Spending went from \$121 billion in 2010 to \$122 billion last year, and it's now projected to be \$125 billion this year.

You and the finance minister are responsible for the largest province in Canada, so I think it's very important to ask you this question: Premier, can you explain how going from \$121 billion two years ago to \$125 billion this year is a reduction in spending?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know the member opposite has paid very close attention to all the discussions around the fiscal situation and the budgets and the economy over the last few years, and he will understand that what's really critical at this juncture is that we decrease the rate of growth in terms of our spending. That is the key factor in terms of what Mr. Drummond said to us. It's the key factor in terms of our staying on track to balance the budget by 2017-18.

And as I just said to one of his colleagues, we are actually overachieving on that front. We have a plan, and we have met the targets, and we will continue to meet those targets.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Back to the Premier: Premier, if this is overachieving, I'd hate to see if you underachieved.

Premier, we can't afford to kick this can further down the road with your same policies that your cabinet has embraced. The Fraser Institute reported last month that Ontario's fiscal position is worse than California's. Our debt-to-GDP ratio is 37%, the same as Greece in 1984. We spend \$11 billion on interest charges. Every day of inaction digs us deeper in debt, and you're mortgaging our children's future.

The PC Party has put forward a number of ideas that would save money: for instance, an immediate, across-the-board public sector wage freeze. It would save \$2 billion. Today we will debate and vote on legislation to implement a wage freeze for the entire public sector. Premier, will you stand up with us for the Ontario people and support this bill?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I spoke to your colleague, the outcome in terms of constraining wages is exactly what we are achieving, and we will continue to work on that.

But we've held spending growth to 0.9%, which is in line with what Mr. Drummond suggested that we do. I know that the party opposite is exactly in favour of what Mr. Drummond suggested that we do. I think it's really important for the people of the province to understand that, as Don Drummond said in his report, "Ontario is neither a high-tax nor high-spend province." So he—

Interjections.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Well, that's what Mr. Drummond said.

The reality is that we have said—

Interjections.

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The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Wrap up.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We have said clearly that we understand that we have to constrain our spending increases. That's what we're doing. That's why we're on track to balance the budget by 2017-18, and we're going to stay on track.

NORTHERN ONTARIO

Mr. John Vanthof: My question is for the Premier. Premier, tomorrow will be one year since I introduced a motion on the creation of an all-party committee to examine all legislation relating to northern Ontario. This motion passed with support from all three parties. Yet here we are a year later, and the government has failed to act on the establishment of the all-party northern committee. Instead, this government seems more interested in a photo op in Sault Ste. Marie with just a select few Liberal MPPs as your northern caucus.

Premier, will you establish an all-party northern committee to discuss northern concerns?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We're holding a cabinet meeting in Sault Ste. Marie. I made a commitment that we would do that within 30 days of my becoming the Premier and—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —following through on that. We're also creating a cabinet committee on the north so that, as policies come forward, they will be looked at through a northern lens.

The time in Sault Ste. Marie tomorrow will not just be about the cabinet meeting. My ministers are meeting with stakeholders; they're going to be engaged with the community members. I think that's very, very important.

We are rededicating ourselves to making sure that we understand the issues of the north and that we engage with people in the north so that we can make sure that policies are sensitive to the issues in the north.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Vanthof: Once again, my question is to the Premier. It's been a year since the northern committee

motion was passed by this House. Since then, your government has decided to dismantle the ONTC, cancel the Ontario Ranger Program, close northern provincial parks and cut jobs at the MNR, and continues to fail to react to issues that are killing jobs in the north, like high energy prices, faulty forest tenure policies and delays with the Ring of Fire.

Northerners are justifiably concerned that your government will only continue to pay lip service to the north's concerns. Once again I ask you: Will you do the right thing and create an all-party legislative committee and give northerners a real voice in this Legislature?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I have spent a lot of time in the north over the last nine and a half years as a minister—

Mr. John Vanthof: So have I.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: And you have, too—absolutely. I appreciate the perspective. A lot of the issues that you've raised are issues that I have heard a lot about.

One of the reasons that we want the Northern Policy Institute to be real is that it will have people from the north on it, who will be able to advise the government, will be able to develop a policy perspective that will be real and that we will be able to tie to the policies that we develop here at Queen's Park.

I look forward to working with the member opposite on the issues that he raises. As I've said, we are setting up a number of mechanisms to make sure that we hear from and that we are able to put that northern lens on the policies that we develop here at Queen's Park.

IMMIGRANTS

Ms. Dipika Damerla: My question is to the brand new Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. May I say, Speaker, what a fantastic job he's doing.

As we all know, Canada is a country of immigrants, and my riding of Mississauga East—Cooksville is no different. People from all over the world call it home.

I hear first-hand the challenges many newcomers face, whether it's finding a job, learning a new language or finding a place to live. I am indeed fortunate that my community is served by organizations like the Peel newcomer centre, Dixie neighbourhood, Employment Access and India Rainbow. They do such a fantastic job.

Minister, my question to you is, what is the government doing to support newcomers so they can become effective members of our society and our economy?

Hon. Michael Coteau: I want to thank my colleague from Mississauga East for the question—thank you so much. She recognizes the vital contributions that newcomers make here in Ontario, and I thank her for her advocacy.

Mr. Speaker, on November 5, our government set a new direction for immigration in Ontario, introducing Ontario's first immigration strategy. The strategy has three key objectives: first, to attract a skilled workforce in Ontario and to build a stronger economy. Also, we're helping newcomers and their families achieve success

here in Ontario, and maximizing the diversity that we have here in this province to ensure that we continue to have prosperity.

This is a comprehensive plan, one that will attract the newcomers that our economy needs to make sure that they're successful. Implementing Ontario's immigration strategy is a critical step towards growing an economy that benefits all Ontarians. We know when newcomers succeed in this province, Ontario succeeds.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Dipika Damerla: Minister, in my riding of Mississauga East—Cooksville, there are a number of employers who are having a hard time finding skilled workers they need for specialized fields and high-skilled sectors. But federal changes—and, may I say, Conservative federal changes—to immigration policies have resulted in fewer economic immigrants coming to Ontario. A growing labour shortage could negatively hurt our economy here in Ontario.

On top of that, for a third year in a row, the federal government has cut funding to Ontario settlement agencies. These Conservative federal cuts now total \$85 million. Even though we remain the number one destination for newcomers to Canada, Ontario has an immigration challenge. Minister, what is our government doing to address the concerns of employers in my riding?

Hon. Michael Coteau: We know that some employers are having a hard time finding workers for jobs that require post-secondary education, and also making sure that they have—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, come to order.

Hon. Michael Coteau: The fact is, without immigration, Ontario's aging population would begin to decline by 2014, and that's why our plan calls for the following: We want to make sure that our economic immigrants who are coming here to Ontario move from 52% to 70%. We also want to make sure that our provincial nominee numbers go from 1,000 to 5,000. The third thing: I want to make sure—and this is something I'm really proud of—that our francophone immigrants here in Ontario rise by 5%, and that we reach those targets—sorry, sets a target by 5%.

It's also crucial that we remind the federal government that immigration here is a shared responsibility. I encourage all members in this House on both sides to pick up the phone and talk to the federal Conservatives to make sure that we reach these targets.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION

Mr. Randy Hillier: My question is to the Minister of Labour. Minister, today hundreds of contractors from around Ontario are joining us in this House because of Bill 119. Your government has used Bill 119 to force contractors to pay for mandatory WSIB premiums. These contractors already pay for private insurance because it covers them 24/7, because if they slip or fall at work or at

home, their livelihood depends on their ability to work. Now they're being forced to pay WSIB premiums, insurance that costs six to seven times more than their existing private insurance that they will continue to need.

Minister, can you explain to the contractors here with us today why your government believes they should pay for inferior, redundant WSIB coverage? Enough is enough for these—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Minister of Labour?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Minister of Labour?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker. I want to thank the member opposite for the question. I had the opportunity to meet with the member yesterday and also the member from Essex, and I look forward to working with both of them to ensure that we continue to improve the working conditions of all the workers in our province.

I also want to welcome all the hard-working construction workers and employers who are here today in the Legislature as well.

I think we all will agree that we collectively have the desire to improve the health and safety of all workers in the construction industry and to reduce the underground economic activity, and that's exactly what Bill 119 is doing. Ever since this legislation was brought forward in 2008, the WSIB has worked with construction stakeholders to ensure that we have a system that balances the concerns of workers and businesses.

We listened to the concerns of the stakeholders and we've given a four-year transition period to implement this legislation—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Randy Hillier: Minister, there's a 25-year-old Hamilton contractor who's here with us today in the House. His name is Justin. He has a wife and a 6-month-old daughter. Your government is forcing him to choose between paying \$5,000 a year for redundant WSIB coverage or saving money for his family and his daughter's future. Your government is forcing him to pay for this pointless insurance instead of saving \$150,000 for his daughter's education. He wants to play by the rules, but these rules just aren't fair and won't let him.

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Minister, can you explain to Justin why you are forcing him to choose between his family and his daughter's future, feeding that monstrous WSIB monopoly with another tax grab or choosing between staying legal and going out of business or having to join the underground economy?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Stop the clock. I will repeat what many Speakers have said in the past—that we absolutely invite and want our guests to be here to watch, and that's it: watch. We do not allow any participation whatsoever from the gal-

series—all galleries. I would just remind us to please observe those rules. We would deeply appreciate it.

Minister of Labour?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker. This is a very valid question. I really appreciate the member for asking this because there are some very significant differences between WSIB insurance versus private insurance. WSIB coverage not only deals with an injured worker at the time of their injury but also provides benefits to assist them in their post-injury state.

The WSIB provides a competitive but different no-fault insurance product that protects employers from costly lawsuits and has predictable rates, tax-deductible premiums and reliable benefits. The benefits paid by WSIB—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. I think the member from Oxford is going to get a warning if he doesn't watch it, especially when I get quiet. That's not the spot to start to inject.

Minister of Labour, finish, please.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker. Benefits paid by WSIB can be more comprehensive and cover a broader range of services—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, second time, I've named his riding.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, this is very important—such as WSIB pays up to 85% net wage loss; benefits include loss of retirement income paid to injured workers from age 65; a special allowance for severely impaired workers, including independent living allowances; and, most importantly, work reintegration and retraining services, if needed. These are important differences between private insurance and WSIB.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is to the Premier. Today, Campaign 2000 released its annual report on child poverty. The report states that the government's 2012 budget "derailed effective anti-poverty measures."

Will the government promise to help, not hurt, low-income families in the 2013 budget by, among other steps, at the very least, allowing social assistance recipients to keep the first \$200 of their monthly employment earnings?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I really appreciate the member's question, and I totally appreciate the work of Campaign 2000. In fact, I did some work for that organization before I was in elected office and I know that it's very sound work that they do. In fact, they were one of the poverty groups that called on the government (a) to have a poverty reduction strategy and (b), to put the Ontario child benefit in place, which has made a difference to tens of thousands of children.

Is there more to be done? Absolutely. Is the issue of the ability of people to keep more of the money that they

earn when they're working in the workforce, people with disabilities—absolutely. That's something that we need to look at, Mr. Speaker. It's something that we signalled in the throne speech that we believe needs to be addressed. It's one of the things that the Lankin-Sheikh report identified. I look forward to working with you on that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Again back to the Premier: Campaign 2000's report states that "policy decisions ... in the 2012 Ontario budget made survival even more difficult for the over 383,000 children living in poverty." That's one in seven children in Ontario. As the report points out, the Liberal government has cut housing and health benefits, delayed child benefits, and frozen minimum wage below the poverty line.

Will the government help low-income families get back on their feet in the next budget—specifics now—or will it once again push them deeper into poverty?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think the premise of some of the issues that the member raises I would have to question, in terms of some of the housing benefits, which we actually have combined and have changed. But we have continued to invest in affordable housing and will continue to do that.

I have said very clearly, and our throne speech outlined that one of the issues that we want to look at is how we can work to make sure that people who are earning—people who are on disability, on ODSP, and work can keep more of the money that they earn. I think it's an important issue, as well as some of the other social assistance issues that are raised by the Lankin-Sheikh report. I think that there is a lot of work to be done there, and I look forward to working with the member on those issues.

SENIOR CITIZENS

Mr. Joe Dickson: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. It has been one year since the minister released her action plan for health care. In this plan, the minister promised to provide Ontarians with the right care, at the right time, in the right place. Many of my Ajax-Pickering constituents, especially seniors, rely on community services as part of their everyday health care.

Speaker, through you, can the minister please tell this House what this government has been doing to improve access to community services for seniors?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I welcome the question from the member from Ajax-Pickering because I think all of us in this House recognize that we need to do whatever we can to support our seniors to stay healthy and to stay home as long as possible.

Speaker, that's why in our last budget we prioritized community supports. We have a 4% increase in the community sector—that includes community care, home care and community services.

Each of the LHINs went through a process—and I would urge everyone here to check with their LHIN to find out what specific investments were made with this 4% increase in spending. The LHINs were tasked with the responsibility of reducing emergency department and ALC rates, reducing avoidable hospital admissions and increasing access to mental health and addiction services. The Central East LHIN, which is represented by the member, has done a fantastic job.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Joe Dickson: Thank you, Speaker, and through you back to the minister: Demographics in Ontario are changing. In just four years, Ontario will be home to more people over the age of 65 than those under 14 years old. In 20 years, the number of seniors will double in the province. I've heard from many Ontarians that as they grow older, they want to maintain their health and independence. I know I certainly do.

Speaker, can the minister tell us how she plans to address the pressures that the health care system will face as the number of seniors grows, while allowing them to live independently?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: One way this increase—this 4% increase—will address the priorities is by providing home care for 90,000 more seniors. It enhances supportive housing, palliative care, caregiver respite programs, day programs for people with Alzheimer's, in-home respite—a range of programs with one goal, and that is to keep people at home, where they want to be, as long as possible.

We're also expanding house calls: 30,000 more people will receive house calls this year. We're increasing access to personal support workers—250 more short-stay beds for people who need a little bit of care after they're ready to leave hospital but they're not quite ready to go home. We're going to take care of them in short-stay beds. It will help 1,500 more seniors get that appropriate transition from hospital to home.

SKILLED TRADES

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: My question is for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, and I welcome everybody here today in the audience, all the contractors etc.

In Ontario, we have over 600,000 people out of work. Each and every month the job losses continue to rise—48,000 in January alone. Over and over again, your government finds new ways to tax and squeeze scarce dollars out of the private sector while at the same time harassing these hard-working Ontarians. Two examples: your Bill 119 is a new WSIB tax on small business. It impacts small construction companies at an average yearly rate of about \$5,500 while at the same time giving them nothing. Your new trades tax on journeymen and apprentices is the same. It is a 600% increase over previous fees and offers them absolutely nothing. It is apparently—get this—covering the cost of hiring 150 new trades cops. Can you believe that?

1120

So, to the minister: Can you explain to me what the 150 new trades cops that the College of Trades is hiring will be doing that Ministry of Labour inspectors aren't already doing?

Hon. Brad Duguid: Speaker, I say this as charitably as I can in this place: The member's description of the College of Trades and the membership fee is grossly, grossly inaccurate. It does an absolute injustice to all tradespeople and, in particular, all 44 other professional sectors with similar regulatory bodies.

It's shameful that the member opposite does not think that the tradespeople of Ontario deserve the same respect and professional profile that teachers get, that social workers get, that architects get, that accountants get, that nurses get, that doctors get.

Well, on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, we believe in our skilled trade workers. We will stand up for them and their right to govern themselves and make the important decisions that have to do with their industries, rather than have politicians like the—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I hope we avoid trying to outshout each other.

Supplementary?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Why didn't you ask them?

Minister, as I said, the new trades tax will see journeymen's and apprentices' fees raised by 600%. But yesterday in the House, in your statement on the College of Trades, you said, and I quote, "Not one cent of the registration fees collected by the College of Trades will go to the government."

Minister, we have correspondence directly from your College of Trades confirming that, "HST will be charged on top of the membership fee." So that is \$15.60 on top of the \$120 trade tax. That's \$11 million more on top of the \$84 million that the college will collect on the new trades tax. So, in effect, a journeyperson who is currently paying \$20 per year for their C of Q will now see their fee increased to \$135.60, or 676%.

Minister, did you know about the HST or is the staff at the College of Trades incompetent?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister.

Hon. Brad Duguid: It's always about character with these guys, Mr. Speaker. It's always about character, whether it's about our character or whether it's about character of hard-working skilled labourers in this province.

Why do the PCs think—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Simcoe North asked the question and I would hope he would give the courtesy to listen to the answers, because I can't hear.

Minister.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Why do the PCs think that decisions on compulsory trades, on apprenticeship ratios, on standards should be made by politicians, lobbyists and bureaucrats? I think that's pretty arrogant that the PC Party thinks that they know more about the skilled trades than our trade workers themselves. The College of Trades will empower this sector to make its own decisions. Why would he be opposed to that? The College of Trades will enhance consumer protection. Why would you be opposed to that? The College of Trades will better protect certified skilled workers from unfair competition from the underground economy. Mr. Speaker, I have no idea why they'd be opposed to that.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. Over the last two weeks, New Democrats have been raising the alarm about cuts to front-line care workers, hospital beds and services in Windsor and London. Today, we're learning of another 35 cuts to staff and services at Bluewater Health in Sarnia. The people who live in Windsor, London and now Sarnia are justifiably concerned, but when questioned about this disturbing trend, the government says everything's hunky-dory.

Can the Premier please explain to Ontarians why her health minister thinks cuts to front-line services care is "okay"?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: As I said earlier in this House, our health care sector is in a time of transformation. We are changing how we deliver care. We're changing for two reasons. One is that we have a demographic shift well under way. As our population ages, we need to deliver care differently.

The other reality is our fiscal reality. We simply don't have the luxury of the 6% or 7% annual increases to our health care budget that we used to have. As we transform our health care system and as we do things differently, we will be increasing supports in the community sector and there will be some reductions in our hospitals.

But we will always look at what's important to patients. That's the only thing that matters to me: Are patients getting better care? Are we able to serve more people? Is it higher-quality care—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I think if you ask Ontarians, the answer would be no, Speaker. They're not getting better care. I've heard from concerned residents in Windsor and in London, and judging by media reports, I think I'll be hearing from people in Sarnia very soon. Patients are definitely not okay with cuts to their front-line hospital care, and front-line care workers have a hard time understanding how closing hospital beds is "not a bad thing," as the minister claims.

New Democrats have suggested a more balanced way to fund better home care by capping hospital CEO

salaries and finding savings in administrative costs of the LHINs and the CCACs. Will the Premier please explain to the people of Windsor, London, and now Sarnia, why her government prefers to cut hospital beds and front-line workers instead?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I think it is enormously important that we do measure how our health care system is doing, and we have entrenched metrics within our health care system that measure the quality of care and that measure access to care.

What matters to me is that people are getting access to care in a timely way. That's why we've invested in our wait time strategies and brought down our surgical and diagnostic wait times dramatically.

Speaker, it matters to me that people get access to primary care. That's why we now are committed to making sure all our seniors, for a start, have access to primary care. We measure quality in a way we never did before. These are metrics that matter to patients.

The NDP might choose to ignore our fiscal reality. The Conservative Party wants us to slash and burn. We have found the right spot. We're improving quality, and we're getting better value for our health care dollars.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I will continue to use expressions that some Speakers have used in the past, and I think they're appropriate. If there's another conversation going on in between the question and the answer, take it outside.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: That means you, Bradley.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That means the member from Nepean–Carleton will not speak when I'm finished.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I'm sorry.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): New question.

FIRE SAFETY

Ms. Soo Wong: My question is for the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. One of my constituents in Scarborough–Agincourt recently contacted me about fire safety in long-term facilities and retirement homes. She recalled from the 2012 fall session that the minister spoke about expediting the technical consultation which will identify fire safety improvements in residences for seniors, people with disabilities and other vulnerable Ontarians. I know that the technical consultation is a vital step and builds on preliminary consultations which identify some of the key areas of improvement, including enhancing inspections, training for owners and operators and staff, installation of automatic sprinklers and other fire safety retrofits.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister: Can you please tell the House the status of the technical consultations?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I want to thank the member from Scarborough–Agincourt for asking this very important question. Given the importance of this issue, I've asked the technical advisory committee to accelerate

the technical consultation by four months, and they did, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the technical advisory committee completed initiatives ahead of time. I'm pleased with the progress and want to thank everyone involved, including officials in the ministry and the Office of the Fire Marshal.

Over 45 days, Ontario has been seeking public input on proposed changes to the fire code and building code that will improve fire safety in residences for seniors, people with disabilities and other vulnerable individuals. Today is the last day for the consultations, and I want to make sure that everybody knows about it and everybody has their input.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Soo Wong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents will be pleased to hear about these new developments. But, Minister, were these public consultations necessary when we already had gone through two sets of consultations?

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister: Can you please tell the House the reasons why we are going through this process?

1130

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Yes, it's a good question, because public consultation is required when making regulatory changes. Our proposed changes include: a phase-in of mandatory sprinklers for all existing care residents and retirement homes with more than four occupants over the next five years; annual validation of fire safety plans by local fire services; enhanced fire inspection and staff training; and fire safety enhancement for all new retirement homes.

Input from the public and impacted stakeholders enables us to strike the right balance. We've taken strong action, and Ontario is on the way to being the only province to make retrofit sprinklers mandatory. The safety of our most vulnerable citizens is a priority.

Mr. Speaker, all of us have someone like my mother who is looking to go to a residence; I'll make sure that there are sprinklers in the residence that she will go to.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Rob Leone: My question is for the Premier. We began asking questions about the gas plants last April. We requested documents by way of motion in the estimates committee in May. The committee agreed to report to the House about the documents in July, which it did in August. It took a motion of contempt to see any documents come forward. Then McGuinty prorogued the Legislature for 127 days so this government could avoid answering questions and accountability. Then this House resumed to move contempt again in February, so that the justice committee could order an investigation on the gas plant scandal. Now, we finally have an admission that more documents are out there, and that they'll be released.

Premier, my question is simple: Does it really have to be this hard to ask for accountability from this government?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, there are really two questions to go back to the opposition: Will they support the unanimous consent motion that I plan to present to the House leaders at lunch today, which will allow the committee to not only look into the matter of the production of documents relating to the member's motion, but also look at the tendering, planning, commissioning, cancellation and relocation of the gas plants? And the second question is, will the honourable member commit that the Progressive Conservative Party will co-operate fully with the committee when it comes to their decision to cancel the plants and provide the type of policy analysis, funding and financial breakdown, and study that I'm sure went into their decision?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Rob Leone: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure the government House leader is practising for when we're on that side of the House and they're really asking us these questions.

I'm going to ask this question back to the Premier. Premier, you were part of the government that made the decision to actually locate the gas plants. As a result of the Liberal decision to do this, we have wasted \$1.3 billion to not even produce one megawatt of power.

You've known about this scandal and our request for documents since last April. While you were in the McGuinty cabinet, did you ever express this desire for full openness and transparency, or is this a deathbed conversion in the dying days of your government?

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, perhaps at the committee, the honourable member can say whether he opposed the PC plan to cancel the plant. Did he phone his fellow candidate Geoff Janoscik when he put out the release saying—

Interjections.

Hon. John Milloy: Wait, wait, wait—"Unlike the Dalton McGuinty Liberals, the only way to guarantee this power plant does not get built is to"—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Leeds-Grenville will withdraw.

Mr. Steve Clark: Withdrawn.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): And while I'm at it, bring it down.

Hon. John Milloy: Here it is, Mr. Speaker: "Unlike the Dalton McGuinty Liberals, the only way to guarantee this power plant does not get built is to elect a Tim Hudak Ontario PC government. A Tim Hudak government will cancel this plant."

I'll have to check the record; I don't remember the member from Cambridge opposing his party leader when he made that commitment.

Again, Mr. Speaker, we look forward to vigorous discussion at committee, where they can bring forward the policy analysis and costing, which I'm sure they did before making that commitment during the 2011 campaign.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question is for the Minister of Economic Development. Nine months ago, Knorr Brake Ltd. of Kingston received \$226,000 from this government's Eastern Ontario Development Fund. Yesterday, we learned that it would be shutting down its Kingston facility and moving its work to Watertown, New York.

When will this government start tying job guarantees to its so-called job-creation grants, and will the government immediately ask Knorr to return any money it has received?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: The short answer is: We already do tie those requirements, those benchmarks and clawback provisions to the agreements that we provide—in this case, to the Eastern Ontario Development Fund.

In the case of Knorr Brake—again, as I mentioned in a similar situation—our primary concern is with the workers who are at risk here, the workers and their families who are being laid off and impacted by this announcement. It's never good news to the community or the families themselves.

I want to make sure that the impression isn't left that these funds, in fact, aren't put to good use, because with the Eastern Ontario Development Fund, we've invested approximately \$60 million so far, leveraging \$600 million, and we have helped to create or retain 13,500 jobs thus far. This is an important fund. Of course, with this particular situation, we are very concerned with the workers and their families.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Second time I've asked members to take it outside. Maybe I'll refer specifically to the members to take it outside for the rest of the day.

Supplementary?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Eighteen new jobs were supposed to be created in Kingston in return for the \$226,000 grant. Instead, 86 people in Kingston are losing their jobs as this company moves its business to New York. This is not a good or fair deal for the people of the province. Ontario has lost 300,000 good-paying manufacturing jobs on this government's watch.

Will this government immediately ask Knorr to return all funds forwarded to them, and when will it start including ironclad job guarantees in its granting program?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: The member opposite obviously doesn't know this: Those clawback provisions are in place in the case of Knorr in Kingston. We have disbursed approximately \$130,000 to this company so far. We've asked for those funds back. The company has said that they will repay those funds.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

M. Shafiq Qaadri: J'ai le plaisir d'adresser ma question à la ministre des Services aux consommateurs.

My question, as I've just said, is to the Minister of Consumer Services. It's on the broad area of consumer

protection, specifically with reference to home inspectors. Of course, when couples and young families are embarking on a home purchase—usually the largest that they'll ever make in their entire lives—it can be a very complex and daunting undertaking. Of course, the list that folks have to go through is very lengthy: everything from deciding about location, complex rules of mortgages, the right real estate agent, nearby amenities, and so on. One of the things that the government is moving towards in 21st-century homebuying is to make sure that well-trained and professional home inspectors are available, especially before folks make that massive commitment, signing on the bottom line.

My question to the Minister of Consumer Services: Would she share with us what the government's plans are with reference to maintaining certification, having appropriate training, and bringing the necessary professionalism in this domain?

Hon. Teresa Piruzza: First, I'd like to thank the member for Etobicoke North for his question and his overall appreciation of consumer protection in Ontario. Our government realizes that when consumers spend up to hundreds of thousands of dollars on a home, they want to know they've made a sound decision guided by qualified and reliable experts. As the member stated, one of the most important decision-making factors for all homebuyers is that home inspection. Homeowners and buyers want to rely on a qualified expert's opinion to support their decision-making process.

That's why our government recently announced our intent to consult on setting minimum qualifications for home inspectors in Ontario. We believe in raising standards for home inspectors, and this will help buyers and sellers. We want greater transparency when making one of the most important decisions that Ontarians make: purchasing a home.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There are no deferred votes. This House stands adjourned until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1140 to 1300.

BIRTH OF MEMBER'S GRANDCHILD

Mr. John O'Toole: With your indulgence, Speaker, I'd like to announce to the House that last Thursday, February 21, at 9:30 p.m., my son Andrew and his wife, Alison, had their second little baby girl, Madison. She was born at Lakeridge Health in Oshawa at 9:30 in the evening, as I said, at eight pounds, four ounces. This is our 10th grandchild.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I think the member was introducing them as if they were on their way to the House to present their grandchild for the first time.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Cindy Forster: I'd like to introduce Frank Campion, in the gallery. He's a councillor from the city

of Welland and he's here today around our health petitions.

Mrs. Jane McKenna: I have the president of the Ontario Technical League. Steve Sell is from Burlington.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'd like to introduce Allan and Marie Russell. They're hard-working contractors—a carpenter, a plumber—and their business is at risk with these changes in WSIB.

Mr. John O'Toole: I'd also like to recognize one of my constituents, who has a drywall company: Shawn Keene, who is here to protest Bill 119. Welcome, Shawn.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

WORKERS' COMPENSATION

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Speaker, the Liberal government continues to prove their desire to discourage small business and debilitate economic growth in Ontario. Their new WSIB tax grab proves they don't know how to manage the economy. The CFIB has a good case that this is strictly trying to cover WSIB's own unfunded liability on the backs of these hard-working small business owners and independent contractors.

Mandatory WSIB is unfair because it forces business owners who have their own private insurance to pay WSIB premiums, dramatically raising the cost of doing business. This will increase the underground economy because prices will go up and this will encourage people to go to unlicensed contractors. CFIB also states it could potentially put 19% of independent contractors out of business due to increased costs.

Speaker, the PC Party will eliminate this tax. It does not increase worker safety since private coverage is generally more extensive and it does not deter the underground economy. In addition, the PC Party will continue its commitment to supporting small business by also eliminating the College of Trades.

Speaker, I have here today—and I'll present many petitions and many names of independent contractors, and people who are aren't even involved in the contracting field, because they think this WSIB change is a sham, it's unfair and it's going to kill jobs.

On behalf of my constituents of Elgin—Middlesex—London, I'm going to work as hard as I can to end this tax grab.

HAMILTON CENTRE FOR CIVIC INCLUSION

Mr. Paul Miller: "What's one thing you would change in your community that would make it better for you and your family?" "What can governments do to make you feel more included in Hamilton?"

Speaker, those questions come from the website of the Hamilton Centre for Civic Inclusion, or HCCI. This group works hard in our community to create opportuni-

ties for civic inclusion. They hold what they call a conversation café, which is an opportunity to include representatives from as many ethnocultural backgrounds as possible talking about their hopes, their dreams, their vision for future Hamiltonians.

Some Hamilton politicians participated in the inaugural event. HCCI advertised the inaugural event in four languages and provided on-site interpreters to assist in as many other languages as they possibly could.

The idea of planning how Hamilton will look to all residents in the future and beginning that planning right now is such a smart and progressive idea. The HCCI website quotes a participant saying, "I'd like to see Hamilton become the best place for new immigrants to come to Canada and integrate into Canadian society."

These conversation cafés begin the discussion about what Canadian society will look like in the future—in my children's future. Hamilton will be at the forefront with initiatives like the conversation cafés.

My compliments to the hard-working people who make the Hamilton Centre for Civic Inclusion the success it is.

CYCLONE MANUFACTURING

Mr. Bob Delaney: Late last year, I visited Taiwan with an Ontario delegation and a leading-edge western Mississauga aerospace firm, Cyclone Manufacturing. When Cyclone first moved to Meadowvale in 2004, they employed 80 people. With help from a Next Generation of Jobs Fund grant through the Ministry of Research and Innovation, along with their proprietary technology and a skilled and specialized workforce, Cyclone now employs some 400 people. They project 500 good-paying manufacturing jobs by this time next year.

Ontario helped Cyclone expand its ability to precision-manufacture airframe parts from a single block of aluminum, using no rivets or welds, with computer-assisted design and manufacturing.

Cyclone's clients include the who's who of aviation: Boeing, Lockheed Martin, Gulfstream, Airbus Industrie and more.

In Taiwan with Cyclone president Andrew Sochaj in December, I witnessed the signing of an \$11-million agreement between Cyclone and Taiwanese airframe maker AIDC. The two firms will produce the tail assembly of Bombardier Challenger series 300 jets.

Meadowvale is home to world-class aerospace technology. Cyclone Manufacturing, helped by the province of Ontario, has won lucrative international business and is building state-of-the-art aircraft and world-class manufacturing careers in western Mississauga.

JURY DUTY

Mr. John O'Toole: Today, more than half of Canadians in territories and provinces are allowed—if their citizens are over 65—to opt out of jury duty. I urge the House to extend a similar courtesy to Ontario seniors.

Most seniors are ready, willing and able to go through a jury selection process and perform their civic duty. At the same time, some older adults have family problems, health problems, mobility, transportation—and aren't able to perform their jury duty. Some are caring for their disabled spouse and have other challenges. It is difficult for some seniors to serve on jury. If they receive a summons, it is an added hardship to go before the judge to apply to be exempt.

Ontarians over 65 have worked hard, paid their taxes, raised their families, volunteered and built the high quality of life that Ontarians enjoy today.

Next week, I will be introducing a private member's bill to allow for seniors over 65 to apply and opt out of jury duty selection.

It's time for Ontario to consider joining other provinces such as British Columbia, PEI, Quebec, Saskatchewan and many of the other provinces and territories and allow seniors to opt out of jury duty and allow others to do the duty that they're required to do.

HOMELESSNESS

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I rise today—really, a memorial to the seven who have died on the streets of Toronto since January and the 700 who have died on the streets of Toronto since the 1980s. A group of very dedicated people meet every year at the homeless memorial outside of the Holy Trinity church downtown.

But more to the point, where is the political will to do something about it? I think in the city of Toronto we're so inured now to seeing people sleeping on grates that we've forgotten that we can do something about it, Mr. Speaker. We can do something about it, and certainly we can do something about poverty, as we heard today, with the release of Campaign 2000's document, among many others.

I want to highlight an individual and an organization that are doing something about it. Bonnie Briggs, a phenomenal woman who lives in my riding, is responsible for that homeless memorial. It was she who originally set it up and who continues to do it. Also, Parkdale Activity-Recreation Centre, a phenomenal organization that feeds hundreds of people every day—tonight is a fundraiser for them. I certainly recommend that any member or anyone who's near attend that. It's at 3030 Dundas Street. There, they will try to raise some funds to make up for the shortfall of funds that they do not get from this government or, of course, from the federal government either.

Again, it's time to recommit to do something about this so that no one else need die on the streets of Toronto.

1310

ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: I rise in the House today to speak about the issue of Alzheimer's. It's a form of dementia. I am going to reintroduce my bill again, which

was supported by both parties—and hopefully by both sponsors again.

We live in a country where there are now more people over the age of 65 than under the age of five. The issue of Alzheimer's is a tsunami that is going to overtake us in the near future if we do not do something about it now.

Our challenge is that this disease is a progressive disease for which there is no cure. The assumption is that families can just jump in and do it all, but that is simply not the case. It's a challenge that is 24/7 in terms of looking after someone. They need respite and they need support.

Most importantly, this government or any government needs to listen to the people who are either the caregivers with folks who have Alzheimer's dementia or to those in the medical profession who are now beginning to understand the extraordinary challenges of this aging society. It's not just the government that has all the answers. It's time that we actually sit down and talk to everyone who has something to say about this progressive disease on how we can work together to ensure that people have the support they need in order to stay at home to look after those with this incredible disease. So I'm looking for your support once again.

CURLING CHAMPIONSHIP

Mr. Rod Jackson: I'm very happy to rise today to speak about the 2013 Dominion Tankard, which brought the Dominion Men's Curling Championships to the Barrie Molson Centre earlier this month. It was my pleasure to be in attendance at the opening ceremonies in Barrie and be part of the opening ceremonies and speak with many of the curlers.

I'm always pleased to support tourism and sport in the region, and it was great to see how the Barrie Curling Club and Tourism Barrie came together to host a really, really excellent and smooth Dominion Tankard. There was a lot of curling talent gathered there, and it was a pleasure to watch. The Dominion Tankard event was a terrific showcase of the sport as 11 strong sides fought for the chance to represent the province of Ontario at the Brier championship, which is going on right now, I believe.

Congratulations are due to Team Howard, a great Simcoe county team, and his rink, consisting of skip Glenn Howard, who will be curling for his fifth Brier championship, and his team of Wayne Middaugh, Brent Laing and Craig Savill. I would like to wish Team Howard the best of luck at the upcoming Brier championship, which runs from March 2 to 10—so it's not on right now. It's a team full of strong community leaders and ambassadors for the sport. I know they will make Ontario proud and they'll continue to grow curling across the province and across the country, and actually worldwide, in the case of Team Howard.

Again, I must congratulate the organizers of the event and the Barrie region for hosting a very successful tournament. I was proud to help host the event and take

part in the ceremonies and actually watch some of the curling—world-class stuff. We hope they come back in the future.

COMMUNITY SAFETY

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I rise today to speak about safety in our communities. Later this afternoon, I will be reintroducing a bill that perhaps just by the title doesn't say what its intent is. It's Bill 8, the Liquor Licence Amendment Act (Serving Liquor in Certain Places). It's really a bill, as I said, that means to bring safety to our communities and to target booze cans.

What are booze cans? These are places, typically in urban neighbourhoods, where illegal alcohol is sold but that also attract a certain criminal element and therefore are not only a nuisance because of the noise or maybe because of safety—a fire hazard for their neighbouring residents and businesses—but also can endanger innocent lives. Many times, the lives that are endangered are the ones of our youth. We just have to go back a few days ago, February 24, when the life of a 25-year-old was taken in an after-hours club here in Toronto. It's typical of urban ridings, but it's a problem and an issue that is growing, and I look forward to other members' support.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION

Mr. Randy Hillier: Today I want to acknowledge the hundreds of men and women who took time off work to get involved with this institution we represent here: democracy.

I've long advocated that democracy is not a spectator sport, and that it's not something that you do only once every four years. In this Legislature, we lose sight of the impact that our decisions have on the people of this province, and the contractors who have joined us today from around Ontario are proof of just that.

Today, hundreds of contractors from around the province have taken a day off work, a day without pay, a day away from their families and businesses, to remind us all that one decision made in this House can take away their entire livelihoods for good, to remind us that a political decision like the passage of Bill 119 may pick winners but it also creates losers. It forces these men and women out of work or into the underground economy; it makes putting dinner on the table that much harder.

That's why, in a few minutes, I'll be tabling legislation to repeal the provisions of Bill 119, to level the playing field for everyone who wants to compete, live and work in this province. The contractors of Ontario have said enough is enough. Trop c'est trop.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

Mrs. Jane McKenna: I just have a point of order, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I will accept a point of order.

Mrs. Jane McKenna: Thank you so much; that's very kind of you.

I just want to do a correction from what I said earlier. Stephen Sell is the president of the Ontario Electrical League. I said that incorrectly, and I just wanted to correct that on record. Thank you, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member is always in order to correct her record.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

FIRST RESPONDERS DAY ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR LE JOUR DES PREMIERS INTERVENANTS

Mr. Klees moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 15, An Act to proclaim First Responders Day / Projet de loi 15, Loi proclamant le Jour des premiers intervenants.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement?

Mr. Frank Klees: First responders, as we all know, are volunteers and professionals who have dedicated their lives to public service. Their life-saving skills often make the difference between life and death, and their public service deserves to be recognized by us all in this province.

This bill was passed last October 4, unanimously, by all parties in recognition of the important work that first responders do. I am reintroducing it now, and I am hopeful that the government would recognize the importance of this bill, and that at the appropriate time, bring it forward for third reading so that it can be enacted—hopefully in time for this coming May 1.

MUNICIPAL AMENDMENT ACT

(ELECTION OF CHAIR OF YORK REGION), 2013

LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT

LA LOI SUR LES MUNICIPALITÉS

(ÉLECTION DU PRÉSIDENT DE LA RÉGION DE YORK)

Ms. Jaczek moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 16, An Act to amend the Municipal Act, 2001 to provide that the head of council of The Regional Municipality of York must be elected / Projet de loi 16, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2001 sur les municipalités pour prévoir que le président du conseil de la municipalité régionale de York doit être élu.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement?

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Amending the Municipal Act, 2001, in this way will provide that the head of council of the regional municipality of York must be elected and may not be appointed.

You may recall that this bill, previously introduced by my colleague from Richmond Hill, did receive unanimous approval by this House on second reading earlier in 2012. Just as my colleague from Newmarket–Aurora has stated, when it comes up for debate on May 30, I certainly anticipate and hope that again we will pass it unanimously at second reading, and will be requesting a third reading vote as well.

1320

**WORKPLACE SAFETY AND
INSURANCE AMENDMENT ACT
(ALTERNATE INSURANCE PLANS), 2013**

**LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR LA SÉCURITÉ PROFESSIONNELLE
ET L'ASSURANCE CONTRE
LES ACCIDENTS DU TRAVAIL
(RÉGIMES D'ASSURANCE
CONCURRENTS)**

Mr. Hillier moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 17, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 to provide employers with the right to participate in alternate insurance plans / Projet de loi 17, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur la sécurité professionnelle et l'assurance contre les accidents du travail pour accorder aux employeurs le droit de participer à des régimes d'assurance concurrents.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Randy Hillier: This bill amends the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997, to allow an employer, at any time, to opt to participate in an insurance plan that is offered by a private sector insurer, instead of the insurance plan established under the act, if the alternate plan offers benefits to the employer's workers that are comparable to those offered by the insurance plan as it exists under the act as of the date that the amendments to the act come into force. To exercise the option, an employer is required to file a notice with the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board containing the particulars specified in the regulations made under the act. If an alternate plan is in force, the employer or any workers of the employer who are affected by a decision of the insurer under the alternate plan may appeal the decision to the Financial Services Tribunal.

The bill also repeals amendments to the act made by the Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act, 2008—Bill 119—which came into force on January 1,

2013. Those amendments made insurance coverage mandatory in the construction industry for independent operators, sole proprietors, partners in partnerships, and executive officers of corporations. As a result, insurance coverage for those categories of persons in the construction industry reverts to being optional.

**HAWKINS GIGNAC ACT (CARBON
MONOXIDE DETECTORS), 2013**

**LOI HAWKINS GIGNAC DE 2013
(DÉTECTEURS DE MONOXYDE
DE CARBONE)**

Mr. Hardeman moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 18, An Act to amend the Fire Protection and Prevention Act, 1997 to require carbon monoxide detectors in certain residential buildings / Projet de loi 18, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur la prévention et la protection contre l'incendie pour exiger l'installation de détecteurs de monoxyde de carbone dans certains immeubles d'habitation.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Mr. Speaker, this bill would require carbon monoxide detectors in all homes with a fuel-burning appliance or an attached garage. The short title of the bill is the Hawkins Gignac Act, in memory of a family in my riding of Oxford who were tragically killed by carbon monoxide when their fireplace exhaust was blocked. Since I last brought this bill forward, Ontario has had another carbon monoxide tragedy: a senior in Tiny township who passed away just after Christmas.

I hope that, working together, we can pass this bill before any more tragedies occur.

**STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY
AND RESPONSES**

REPETITIVE STRAIN INJURY

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Today marks the 14th annual International Repetitive Strain Injury Awareness Day. When we hear of injuries on the job, sometimes we think of falling and hitting your head. Others think of losing a limb. But work-related repetitive strain injuries, also known as RSIs, are among the most common ways of being injured on the job. It can result from doing the same motion over and over again without suitable breaks, or when our limbs are put in awkward positions doing repetitive work.

Whether it's a teenager stocking shelves at the local supermarket in Thunder Bay or someone simply sitting at

their computer in their office cubicle in Ottawa, RSIs can affect anyone, anywhere. The forces used on the job can be small—as simple as typing—but the impact can be devastating. Some end up with a constant, gnawing pain in their ligaments; others feel so much pain that they can't get a good night's sleep. Others struggle to even get out of bed.

RSIs are a major component of musculoskeletal disorders, or MSDs, which account for 42% of all lost-time injuries in Ontario. In 2010—in one year alone—that amounted to 739,000 working days and more than \$92 million in medical and other claims—so much pain and suffering for tens of thousands of workers every year across Ontario, yet so easy to overlook.

So each year we mark Repetitive Strain Injury Awareness Day to promote avoidance of these injuries, which can drastically change the lives of those who have them. That's why the Ministry of Labour continues to take action to help workers avoid these types of injuries. On our website—www.ontario.ca/labour—we have a wealth of resources, from videos to fact sheets, interactive tools, podcasts and posters. It contains dozens of sector-specific examples about how these hazards can be eliminated or controlled through innovative designs and workplace practices. Some of that information is available in 14 different languages in addition to English and French.

As part of our Safe at Work Ontario enforcement strategy, we conduct inspection blitzes that focus on MSD hazards. The ministry also conducts blitzes focusing on other hazards, with MSDs as a strong component.

Our government is committed to ensuring workers in this province are protected from injuries and major health hazards on the job, but it all starts with you. It starts in your workplace. Starting today, let's renew our efforts to ensure that our workplaces address these hazards. Let's work hard to ensure that our workers are protected from hazards that could result in years of pain.

Speaker, it starts with us. It starts with prevention, and prevention starts here.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Responses.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Thanks for the opportunity to respond to the ministerial statement on the 14th annual repetitive stress injury day.

As has been pointed out, repetitive stress injuries are actually the most common kind of workplace injuries today. With more and more work being done with less variety—with keyboards, computers and a mouse in a stationary work style—there's more opportunity than ever before to become injured due to repetitive stress.

As some of you know, before being elected to the House I worked as an electrician. Each and every day, I worked using screwdrivers. Unfortunately for me, I became a statistic as well. I became afflicted with a repetitive stress injury in my wrist. My personal experience leads me to believe that we need greater awareness of repetitive stress injuries.

I'm sure the minister opposite has been told about how wonderful that solidarity is. I'm sure that there are some members of the third party that would agree. But as an

electrician, unionized under the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers at the time, solidarity and understanding of my injury was not something present on the job site.

My physician advised me to use a brace and not to use screwdrivers, for that repetitive twisting motion. But it was overcome through a nice and simple bit of 20th-century technology: the battery drill. So I went out and bought one. Unfortunately, when I got on the job site, the battery drill was not part of the prescribed tool list of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers. I was not allowed to use a power drill. So much for solidarity and an understanding of repetitive stress injuries. Instead, they wanted me to continue to repeat that stress and pay for that brace and reduce my productivity.

1330

Instead of using that modern technology to solve a modern injury, all they did was further that injury. Instead of being a more productive worker who would put less of a strain on our health care system, my labour union, the IBEW, and their union rules forced me to be less productive and more injured.

I'm hopeful that in the years since that happened, the IBEW has actually started thinking more about this. I hope that they've started to understand repetitive stress injuries and have started protecting the workers they claim to represent. However, I'm skeptical, and from my own experience and the experience of friends, we've seen just how inflexible and uncompetitive our labour unions are in Ontario today.

I think my personal story illustrates the need for greater awareness of repetitive stress injuries. I know that repetitive stress injuries describe a collection of painful disorders of the tendons, muscles, nerves, back, arms and hands.

I'm pleased that there is this day for awareness of these painful and debilitating injuries—the repetitive stress injury day—and that we recognize just how frequent and unfortunate these injuries are.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm pleased in this year, 2013, to stand to recognize repetitive strain injury day, a day to acknowledge that we still live in a climate and still participate in an economy that has yet to address one of the major components of workplace injury. As we've heard, statistics show that 40%—nearly 50%, actually—of all workplace injuries are attributable to repetitive strain injuries. That isn't necessarily what has been described in here time and time again—screwing a bolt into whatever you screw a bolt into. It is also things that we don't really know: things like constantly looking at a computer screen; a poor ergonomic situation in your working environment—things that can be easily addressed, things that have been studied, things that have been measured, but we have a government that has yet to act to enshrine those changes into the Occupational Health and Safety Act, which is exactly what is needed here, Mr. Speaker.

We can have all the best ergonomic devices in the world and things that fix these problems, but until the

government decides that it should become a measure of law, similar to all the other measures that are enshrined in the Occupational Health and Safety Act to protect workers from noxious gases and high impact and other things, we will not address this problem specifically.

Many of you may know that prior to political life, I was a construction labourer in the heavy construction sector, building bridges and roads and sewers and overpasses. I worked in a unionized environment—proud to be a union member of LIUNA Local 65, where, actually, under our collective agreement, we were allocated appropriate personal protective equipment. We had, our fellow brothers and sisters—I couldn’t tell you how much solidarity there was when another, more senior, journeyman would witness and could see that we were possibly entering into a situation that might harm us. So there was solidarity, certainly, between the ranks when it came to health and safety and when it came to addressing the nature of our work.

Also, Mr. Speaker, we had buy-in from the company, the acknowledgment that when they make a workplace safer, it becomes more productive, it becomes more economical, it becomes more financially beneficial to them to provide us with the high-impact gloves when we were doing jackhammering, or clean and safe equipment, equipment that wasn’t broken down. These are all things that lead to injury and lead to personal costs that many in this province still feel today.

Those who have worked in manufacturing sectors certainly know the strain and stress of a workplace injury.

What I can tell you, too, Mr. Speaker, is that our workers’ compensation system does not completely—actually fails to address the rising nature. I’ll tell you that between 1996 and 2006 the biggest increases to health care costs were for repetitive movement, and although lost-time claims have gone down, injury claims rates have decreased, workers are working in pain as a result of denied claims and aggressive claims.

This goes to the nature of precarious work scenarios in our province, where workers are forced to take jobs that don’t offer benefits, that don’t offer those types of protections, and those are some of the most vulnerable workers in our society. It’s something that I think this government has to fully address, not only in the context of workplace safety, but also as an economic measure where we can start to promote good jobs, give our economy that signal that we are here as a government to support you in the creation of good jobs, and not simply rely on part-time precarious work as a measure of our economic stimulus.

There are so many injured workers that are out there today who are looking toward this government to provide protection, to send a signal that they are here, they are listening and they understand the system is not fully addressing the full scope of workplace injuries.

I stand here today, as a New Democrat, proud to support injured workers in this province, proud to lend my support and my efforts and my energy—and I am

certain on that, on behalf of my caucus—to fully address these workplace injuries, because there is a human cost, there is a financial cost and there is a societal cost.

I think this opportunity to address it is the first step, acknowledging that we can do more and can do better. I certainly look forward to working within this House to address those issues.

PETITIONS

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. John O’Toole: I’m very pleased to be the first to present a petition today, and indeed every day.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Legislative Assembly of Ontario passed Bill 152, the Poverty Reduction Act, 2009 with an aim to ‘support a sustained long-term reduction of poverty in Ontario’;—how have they done?—and

“Whereas fulfilling the promise of this act will increase the health of the people in Ontario with the lowest incomes; and

“Whereas fulfilling the promise of this act will reduce health care costs in the long term by reducing the incidence of chronic disease; and

“Whereas fulfilling the promise of this act will increase the dignity of people with low incomes by reducing visits to food bank and meal programs in Ontario; and

“Whereas fulfilling the promise of this act will reduce inequity in Ontario and provide an economic stimulus by increased spending across Ontario;”

The petitioners petition the Legislative Assembly “to support the recommendations of the social assistance review commission and immediately implement an increase of \$100 a month to bring the base rate of Ontario Works from \$599 per month to \$699 per month as a down payment on adequacy while the system undergoes transformation.”

I am pleased to read this petition and present it to Justin, who will take it to the table, and to sign it.

ASSURANCE CONTRE LES ACCIDENTS DU TRAVAIL

M. Peter Shurman: J’ai une pétition à l’Assemblée législative de l’Ontario sur la Loi 119 :

« Attendu que depuis le 1^{er} janvier 2013, la CSPAAT impose une protection obligatoire aux employeurs ou sociétaires qui étaient jusqu’à présent exemptés de la CSPAAT et qui avaient une assurance privée;

« Considérant que ce nouveau fardeau financier ne fait rien pour améliorer la sécurité des travailleurs et ne fait qu’augmenter les coûts d’exploitation des entreprises en Ontario;

« Nous, soussignés, adressons à l’Assemblée législative de l’Ontario la pétition suivante :

« Abrogez la protection obligatoire imposée par la Loi 119. »

Je vais la signer et la donner à M. Joshua.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Ms. Cindy Forster: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Re: Dr. Kevin Smith’s Niagara Health System report to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care proposed changes to the hospital services in south Niagara.

“Whereas the residents of south Niagara will not have equal, fair, safe and timely access to in-patient gynecological, obstetrical and pediatric services due to distance; and

“Whereas excessive travel times and lack of public transportation for residents in south Niagara will put patient safety at risk; and

“Whereas if implemented, Dr. Smith’s recommendations and the proposed location of a new south Niagara hospital in Niagara Falls is approved, a two-tier health system in Niagara will be created, where north Niagara will be overserviced and south Niagara will be underserviced in relation to the safe and timely access to health and hospital care; and

“Whereas if hospital services including in-patient gynecological and mental health, and all obstetrical and pediatric services from the Welland hospital site and the Greater Niagara hospital site will be relocated to the new north Niagara St. Catharines site in 2013 it will undermine the continued viability of these two sites as full-service hospital sites;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“We request the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to maintain existing services at the Welland hospital site and the Niagara Falls hospital site and that no services are to be moved until this new south Niagara hospital is open and request that any approval for a new Niagara south hospital include a site that is centrally located in Welland.”

I agree with this petition and I affix my signature, and I will send it with—

M^{me} France Gélinas: How many signatures?

Ms. Cindy Forster: Twenty thousand.

1340

SPRINGWATER PROVINCIAL PARK

Mr. Rod Jackson: I have a petition from residents of Barrie to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas we oppose the termination of the operating budget for Springwater Provincial Park in Springwater township on March 31, 2013;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“We ask that the park remain operating and facilities such as the animal sanctuary, cabins/shelters, playground

equipment and ground maintenance remain intact and operating.”

I agree with this petition, I affix my name, and I will give it to page Joe to send to the table.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you.

The member for Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Sorry.

WORKPLACE INSURANCE

Mr. Randy Hillier: Speaker, I have a petition here.

“Whereas beginning 1 January 2013 WSIB was expanded to include groups of employers and principals who had previously been exempt from WSIB and had private insurance; and

“Whereas this new financial burden does nothing to improve worker safety and only drives up the cost of doing business in Ontario;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To repeal the statutory obligations created by Bill 119.”

Speaker, I agree with this petition and affix my name to this—certified—over 4,000 signatures.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you.

PROVINCIAL PARKS

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): To the member for Kenora-Rainy River, my apologies, but you were completely blocked off from my view.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: Thank you, Speaker.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ministry of Natural Resources has announced the end of overnight camping in 10 provincial parks,” including nine “in northern Ontario ... ; and

“Whereas this decision will result in job losses for northern Ontarians and negatively impact tourism and northern Ontario’s way of life; and

“Whereas local stakeholders and municipalities have not been consulted on these closures and have been denied the opportunity to make these parks more sustainable;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To immediately suspend plans to cancel overnight camping at the” nine northern “provincial parks named above; and

“To consult with local municipalities, stakeholders and regional economic development organizations regarding the long-term viability of preserving northern Ontario’s provincial parks.”

I support this and will give this to page Joshua to deliver.

OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN

Miss Monique Taylor: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario Ombudsman, who is an officer of the Legislature, is not allowed to provide trusted, independent investigations of complaints against children’s aid societies; and

“Whereas Ontario is the only province in Canada not allowing their Ombudsman to investigate complaints against children’s aid societies; and

“Whereas people who feel they have been wronged by the actions of children’s aid societies are left feeling helpless with nowhere else to turn for help to correct systemic issues;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to grant the Ombudsman the power to investigate children’s aid societies.”

I couldn’t agree with this more, Mr. Speaker. I will affix my name to it, along with the hundreds that have been put forward before, and give it to page John to bring to the Clerk.

WORKPLACE INSURANCE

Mr. Bill Walker: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario re Bill 119:

“Whereas beginning 1 January 2013 WSIB was expanded to include groups of employers and principals who had previously been exempt from WSIB and had private insurance; and

“Whereas this new financial burden does nothing to improve worker safety and only drives up the cost of doing business in Ontario;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To repeal the statutory obligations created by Bill 119.”

I strongly support it, will affix my name, and send it with page Lauren.

DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition from the people of the northeast:

“Whereas the Ontario government has made positron emission tomography (PET) scanning a publicly insured health service available to cancer and cardiac patients ...; and

“Whereas, since October 2009, insured PET scans are performed in Ottawa, London, Toronto, Hamilton and Thunder Bay; and

“Whereas the city of Greater Sudbury is a hub for health care in northeastern Ontario, with Health Sciences North, its regional cancer program and the Northern Ontario School of Medicine;”

They “petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to make PET scans available through Health Sciences

North” in Sudbury, “thereby serving and providing equitable access to the citizens” of the northeast.

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask page Luisa to bring it to the table.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: This is a petition mostly from St. George’s church in my riding.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Legislative Assembly of Ontario passed Bill 152, the Poverty Reduction Act, 2009 with an aim to ‘support a sustained long-term reduction of poverty in Ontario’; and

“Whereas fulfilling the promise of this act will increase the health of the people in Ontario with the lowest incomes; and

“Whereas fulfilling the promise of this act will reduce health care costs in the long term by reducing the incidence of chronic disease; and

“Whereas fulfilling the promise of this act will increase the dignity of people with low incomes by reducing visits to food bank and meal programs in Ontario; and

“Whereas fulfilling the promise of this act will reduce inequality in Ontario and provide an economic stimulus by increased spending across Ontario;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support the recommendation of the social assistance review commission and immediately implement an increase of \$100 a month to bring the base rate of Ontario Works from \$599 per month to \$699 per month as a down payment on adequacy while the system undergoes transformation.”

I’m pleased to pass this petition on to Charlie.

AIR-RAIL LINK

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. The member for—

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Parkdale–High Park.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Parkdale–High Park.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It’s the greatest riding in the world, Mr. Speaker. And I’m reading:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas diesel trains are a health hazard for people who live near them;

“Whereas more toxic fumes will be created by the 400 daily trains than the car trips they are meant to replace;

“Whereas the planned air-rail link does not serve the communities through which it passes and will be priced beyond the reach of most commuters;

“Whereas all major cities in the world with train service between their downtown core and the airport use electric trains;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the province of Ontario stop building the air-rail link for diesel and move to electrify the route immediately;

“That the air-rail link be designed, operated and priced as an affordable transportation option between all points along its route.”

I couldn't agree more with these thousands of folk, and I'm going to give it to Justin, having affixed my signature, to be delivered to the table.

WORKPLACE INSURANCE

Mr. Jim McDonell: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas beginning 1 January 2013 WSIB was expanded to include groups of employers and principals who had previously been exempt from WSIB and had private insurance; and

“Whereas this new financial burden does nothing to improve worker safety and only drives up the cost of doing business in Ontario; and

“Whereas the chair of the WSIB”—in committee meetings last year—“admitted this will not help cover the accumulated WSIB debt, but make the problem worse by adding further liabilities;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To repeal the statutory obligations created by Bill 119.”

I agree with this and will be signing it.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Miss Monique Taylor: It's a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the legislated cuts to the funding for ophthalmology diagnostic tests are up to 80%;

“Whereas these cuts were implemented without consulting physicians about the impact such cuts will have on the health care of patients;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to protect the ophthalmology services and consult with the physicians before making cuts to our health care.”

I couldn't agree with this more. I will affix my name to it and give it to page Justin to deliver.

1350

LANDFILL

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I have a petition signed by a great many people in my riding of Oxford, and it is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas many of the resources of this planet are finite and are necessary to sustain both life and the quality of life for all future generations;

“Whereas the disposal of resources in landfills creates environmental hazards which will have significant human and financial costs for;

“Whereas all levels of government are elected to guarantee their constituents' physical, financial, emotional and mental well-being;

“Whereas the health risks to the community and watershed increase in direct relationship to the proximity of any landfill site;

“Whereas the placement of a landfill in a limestone quarry has been shown to be detrimental;

“Whereas the county of Oxford has passed a resolution requesting a moratorium on landfill construction or approval;

“Therefore be it resolved that we, the undersigned, humbly petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“To implement a moratorium in Oxford county on any future landfill construction or approval until such time as a full review of alternatives has been completed which would examine best practices in other jurisdictions around the world;

“That this review of alternatives would give special emphasis on (a) practices which involve the total recycling or composting of all products currently destined for landfill sites in Ontario and (b) the production of goods which can efficiently and practically be recycled or reused so as not to require disposal in landfills.”

Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to present this petition, and I affix my signature to it.

INDOOR TANNING EQUIPMENT

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition that comes from a group of youths in my riding, and it reads as follows:

“Whereas there is a growing body of evidence linking tanning bed use to increased cancer risk, the World Health Organization considers tanning beds a group 1 carcinogen, and use of tanning beds before the age of 30 raises one's risk of melanoma by 75%; and

“Whereas many groups, including the Canadian Cancer Society and the Ontario Medical Association, support a ban on the use of indoor tanning equipment by youths under the age of 18; and

“Whereas the provinces of British Columbia and Nova Scotia”—and Quebec—“have passed legislation banning youths from using indoor tanning equipment, and governments around the world are considering similar legislation; and

“Whereas there is broad public support in Ontario for increased regulation of the tanning industry, with 83% of Ontarians “supporting a ban on indoor tanning for those under 18”;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to enact legislation banning youths under the age of 18 from using indoor tanning equipment....”

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask page Stacey to bring it to the table.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

COMPREHENSIVE PUBLIC SECTOR COMPENSATION FREEZE ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR LE GEL GLOBAL DE LA RÉMUNÉRATION DANS LE SECTEUR PUBLIC

Mr. Shurman moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 5, An Act to freeze compensation for two years in the public sector / Projet de loi 5, Loi visant à geler la rémunération pendant deux ans dans le secteur public.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation. Mr. Shurman.

Mr. Peter Shurman: I'm pleased to rise in the Legislature today and speak to what I consider to be an all-important subject, not only to our party but to every reasonable and thoughtful Ontarian out there.

Ontario currently has the highest debt in its history, and there is no sign of any abatement. It's imperative that Ontario have a plan to control its \$12-billion deficit and ballooning debt of over \$236 billion—a debt that is set to hit \$411 billion in just a few years, according to their own economist, Mr. Drummond—\$17,922 of debt for every man, woman and child in the province of Ontario. Ontarians are feeling this economic pinch. Meanwhile, public sector employees are faring pretty well.

I always thought that the union argument they put forward, of using strength in numbers to bargain collectively and level the playing field, had some merit. Now, the shoe is suddenly on the other foot.

I was once a union member, too. That may surprise some people. The Fraser Institute has noted very recently that public sector compensation now exceeds that of the private sector—similar jobs—by about 14%. Now that balloons to 27% when you factor in pensions and health and overall benefits. Another study by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business concurs. You can tell me, if you like, that those are right-wing think tanks or organizations, but it doesn't matter, because StatsCan is the source for the figures. It is indisputable. It is a fact: Private sector workers have been paying for raises for unionized government workers while they themselves are struggling to make ends meet. How is that a level playing field? Over half of all Ontario government program spending goes to public sector labour costs. The single largest item that we spend money on here in Ontario: labour. We cannot afford business-as-usual salary increases any more than the private sector can, and yet it goes on and on.

The McGuinty-Wynne government is the perpetrator of billion-dollar spending scandals, from eHealth to Ornge, and the most recent power plant fiasco ongoing. Liberals cancelled power plants for political gain, and they cost taxpayers at least \$230 million to save the seats

of the member for Mississauga South and the member for Oakville. We think maybe another billion is in there, and the Premier says, "We have no money." You know what? About that, she's right, but she takes no responsibility. The PC caucus is ready to be transparent, to balance the books, to get Ontario out of the debt that the McGuinty-Wynne government has created for us.

Tim Hudak and the PC caucus want a two-year broader public sector legislated wage freeze to save \$2 billion each year. Pretty plain, pretty simple; no exceptions. That will help Ontario level that playing field, which is precisely what every union claims is the only fair approach. It has to work two ways. We cannot begin to control costs without putting a temporary break on a range of out-of-control cost items.

Public sector employees also retire 1.3 years on average earlier than private sector workers. In 2011, job losses were greater in Ontario's private sector than in the public sector; 3.9% of private sector workers lost their jobs that year, compared with only 0.7% of public sector workers, another advantage—Fraser Institute. And 76% of Ontario's public sector workers were covered by a registered pension plan of some type in 2011; that compares to 26% of private sector workers—three times as many in the public sector. Again I have to say: Who has the advantage? Which way is that level playing field tilting, now that it's not level? Is it a level playing field, the one that the unions say is the fairest thing, or is it not? I think the thing speaks for itself: From 2004-10, public sector compensation grew at 4.99% compounding, well above the rate of inflation, which averaged 1.94% during the same time period.

The McGuinty-Wynne government bought labour peace, but they did it on our backs, and when I say "our," I'm talking about everybody who isn't in a union working for the public sector in the province of Ontario. Taxpayers are funding what I call a public service protection racket. That's what this nudge, nudge, wink, wink deal is. Thanks to the Liberal government, the public sector is now a new elite, funded by ordinary Ontarians, protected by union bosses, brought to you by the McGuinty-Wynne government—a level playing field indeed.

Union bosses are controlling Ontario's fiscal agenda, using taxpayers' pocketbooks to feather their own nests. Ontario cannot afford to have unions continue to control the agenda. It has been 10 years of driving up public sector spending and putting the needs of union bosses first; 10 years of taxpayers footing the bill for the Liberals' political gain; 10 years of creating a new and privileged class at the taxpayers' expense. It is now time for action. These are all reasons why we need a two-year, broader public sector legislated wage freeze.

It has been made very, very clear that the McGuinty-Wynne government will continue down this path to financial ruin. We've been here—what?—a week and maybe a couple of days, and that's what we've heard in answers about this given in question period.

1400

When questioned by PC leader Tim Hudak last week, Premier Wynne said that the Liberal government would

not support a wage freeze. The Premier said that there is “wage constraint in place.” But in the same breath, she went on to admit, “The current 12-month average annual wage increase for the broader public service is 0.2%.” First of all, I don’t believe her, and secondly, that’s not a zero.

In this morning’s question period, I myself questioned the Premier, and what I asked her was, “If you’re not prepared to save \$2 billion a year by implementing what we are proposing in Bill 5, please name one item—just give me one item—that you profess or contend will save \$2 billion a year.” I heard no answer to that question; I heard no item. And the reason is very simple: She has no answer.

The McGuinty-Wynne Liberals not only lack a concrete plan but also the backbone to make the necessary changes to get us off this path of financial ruin.

As outlined by Don Drummond in his report, the province’s deficit could balloon to \$30.2 billion by 2017, and our total debt load, already worth 35% of annual economic output, could soar to 51% by that time. This is completely unsustainable. While the average Ontarian doesn’t follow the debates that deal with this on a day-to-day basis in this place, they understand, at the level of going out and finding a job, keeping a job, building a company, keeping a company afloat, establishing a new one—whatever it takes to make money, to put food on the family table—that they’re having trouble, and they’re having trouble because this government has created the conditions where that trouble is going to go on and get worse. Don’t believe me; take a look across the pond at Europe.

I’m going to tell you something. He mentioned, Don Drummond did, that we could soar to 51% and it’s unsustainable. It’s something else: It’s actually immoral, when you consider what you’re doing. Ontario families and businesses are feeling the negative repercussions of the McGuinty-Wynne government’s spending sprees. We need a paradigm shift; we need that.

Even with our current record low interest rates, interest payments on Ontario’s debt will reach almost \$11 billion this year—\$11 billion. If you transpose that and say that that’s a ministry like any other ministry—(1) health; (2) education; (3) debt servicing—interest. What kind of a government does that? And it consumes 9.2% of government revenues in total—a statistically valid fact. So we’re throwing \$11 billion out the window every single year.

When we have a 1% rise in interest rates, which will surely come—it’s inevitable—that alone would add about \$500 million per year to the interest level. Go to 2%, which also is coming somewhere down the road, and that’s another \$500 million, so you’re adding a billion.

Over the last nine years, the McGuinty-Wynne legacy “increased program spending by an average of 6.1% annually”—I’m quoting here—“nearly twice the combined rate of inflation and population growth” at 3.1%. This is from the Fraser Institute, published last week.

The National Post’s Kelly McParland wrote “Ontario’s debt has been gathering speed like a rock plunging down a hill.” That was in November, not very long ago.

The McGuinty-Wynne government has not laid out a plan to rein in their spending or balance the books. Premier Wynne will not take the necessary steps to get Ontario’s spending under control and commit to a legislated wage freeze. The public sector simply cannot escape belt-tightening. We need to end the unfair free ride for public sector employees who, while valued, are not superior to private sector workers. That’s the thing that nobody seems to understand.

Both Moody’s and Standard and Poor’s downgraded Ontario’s credit ratings last year. In April 2012, when Moody’s downgraded Ontario’s rating, they said that there are “significant risks surrounding” their “ability to achieve their medium-term fiscal targets and stabilize and then reverse the recent accumulation in debt.... Expense growth targets appear particularly ambitious.” I submit to you, Speaker, that holds true today.

We need a signal to investors that Ontario is ready to tackle its economic challenges and get our financial house in order. Regaining control of our finances will spur the additional creation of jobs and get our economy moving again. Start reining in spending with a broader public sector legislated wage freeze. Please, give this some thought.

Tim Hudak and the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party have a concrete plan to get Ontario back on track again, and Speaker, that’s exactly what we intend to do.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Sit down please.

Further debate? The member for Kenora–Rainy River.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: Thank you, Speaker. There was a lot of talk just now about the Conservative plan to balance the books, but it really is a misnomer that Conservatives are great stewards of the public purse, because they’re not. If you look at a number of balanced budgets by party, both provincially and federally, you find that the NDP has the best fiscal record in Canada. And I encourage the Conservatives to check that out. We have a better record than both the Conservatives and the Liberals. Not only do we as a party have the highest number of balanced budgets, but we also, if we do go into a deficit, have the smallest average size of a deficit compared to the GDP. Why? I believe it’s because the NDP doesn’t dismiss ideas or back ourselves into corners based on ideology or buzzwords, which is happening right here and right now with the Conservative Party.

The fact is that imposing across-the-board public sector wage freezes is unconstitutional and will end up costing us more money. It will cost the province more money and it will put us further away from the goal of balancing the budget, just like the proposed privatization of the LCBO, as recently proposed by the leader of the PCs. The LCBO is profitable, and so privatization would actually cost the province more money, and it makes no sense. So why would the Conservatives want to privatize

the LCBO if they are truly concerned about the financial bottom line? I would contend it's because they're philosophically opposed to public ownership and unionized jobs. It's not that it is a cost to the Ontario taxpayers; it's just that they're philosophically opposed to having a just society.

Another example of privatization costing us more is road maintenance. It costs us more financially, it has a huge social cost and there's no guarantee of having adequate service. The fact is—and this is a fact I believe the Conservatives need to come to grips with—that there are basic costs of doing business that can't be mitigated.

I'll give you a third and final example of some of the financially reckless and ideological decisions that are made by the PCs that defy logic and end up costing us more money, and that is the closure of the Experimental Lakes Area in my area by the federal government. It will cost the public purse \$50 million to close this facility, because they have to, according to an agreement that they've signed with the provincial government, restore those lakes to the original pristine condition. But they would rather incur \$50 million than they would to spend \$2 million to continue to operate this invaluable research centre. Again, it's because they are ideologically opposed.

New Democrats believe that there is a more balanced way to balance the budget. Not only is it financially reckless to impose this unconstitutional plan of across-the-board wage freezes but it's also unjust. It is unjust to make hundreds of thousands of reasonably paid public servants carry the burden of Ontario's fiscal challenges while letting those who should be paying more off the hook. It's also unjust to freeze modest wages while simultaneously continuing to pay their managers automatic bonuses totalling \$35.6 million. I believe, along with other New Democrats, that we need to ban these automatic bonuses.

A couple of other things that we could do to balance the budget that don't require doing something so unconstitutional and costly would be to close some of the corporate tax loopholes by permanently delaying the HST's input tax credits—that will net the treasury \$1.3 billion annually by 2019—and to work with the federal government to increase corporate tax compliance by reducing the ability of corporations to eliminate or decrease payment of their provincial corporate income tax by shifting profits and losses across Canada. That would bring us about \$50 million in year 1 and about \$200 million by 2017-18. There are other options, options that will actually do what the Conservatives are claiming that they are concerned about, that will help bring in money to the province and help us balance the budget sooner, which is something that we are all concerned about. But there is a way we can do that that is both financially responsible and respectful of the people who work to make this province what it is today.

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The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Mike Colle: I'm happy to engage in this debate on the bill brought forward by the member from Thorn-

hill. I think it's a valuable debate to have and a necessary one, too. Although I may disagree with the approach the bill takes, I think the member does bring out some very concerning economic facts of life.

There are some serious economic challenges facing this province, and I don't think enough people understand the impact that salary, wages and benefits, and pension legacies have on the provincial books. They almost think this is automatic: The money is always going to be there to employ all of our doctors, police officers, firefighters and nurses.

There is a great dependency on human resources in a government of this size. So to bring up the issue of the compensation costs as it refers to provincial government finances I think is a valid concern to raise. As the member said, it's not just the pure salaries that are of concern—and they're not just a concern to us here; everybody, I think, has concerns about the cost of living, concerns about government expenditures and concerns about the fact that, "My job is not guaranteed. I don't know whether I'm going to get a paycheque at the end of the week. I don't know if I'm going to get benefits for my kids' teeth." That's a huge number of people who don't have those protections in place, so they say, "Why, then, do some people have it and I don't?" You're creating this friction, which is a reality.

The member's approach to eliminating this friction is one I don't agree with because, ultimately, it's really going to be almost a bureaucratic nightmare, because you're going to have to impose, essentially, wage control; back to the days of Stanfield and Trudeau, remember? Wage and price controls promised back and forth. You really need to create a whole bureaucracy in terms of identifying which wages you're going to freeze at what point in time.

You can imagine what the physicians and our nurses will say when you tell them their wages are frozen. Some will say, "Well, I've already been frozen for three or four years. Now you're going to freeze me, and the others haven't been frozen? When do I catch up?" There is a real need to look at the consequence because you're going to create, really, something that's contrary to basic Conservative fiscal ideology, and that is to have government intervene in the marketplace and impose a law over market forces, over compensation. That's not very Conservative, really. The marketplace should be able to take care of those issues.

But obviously, the marketplace is not working, because the market has been hijacked by these latte-drinking speculators on Wall Street and the backroom boys in London, England, who manipulate the world financial system at their whim for hedge funds etc. Therefore, we are all victims of this basic manipulation of the world's finances, and governments are caught up in this consequence.

It's not just the Ontario government that's facing these consequences. Just last week, you heard Alberta: Their deficit is four times higher than they predicted. Alberta, that has an overwhelming amount of oil that's gushing

out of the tar sands—they are now facing deficit issues. And let's not talk about the fact that almost all provinces now are facing deficits while the federal government sits back with its laissez-faire attitude, saying, "Oh, well, we're taking care of things." Meanwhile, it's the provinces that have to pay for the biggest-ticket item, and that is health care.

I think the member is right when he says that eventually, if we keep going this way, where provinces keep paying for health care all by themselves, we're going to have two ministries here in Ontario. We're going to have the Ministry of Finance collecting dollars and the Ministry of Health spending dollars. That's where we're getting to, because we do not have a federal plan to support these enormous expenses on health care right across Canada. Basically, the federal government has withdrawn from health care. I mean, who is the Minister of Health? I have no idea—federally. I have no idea who it is. I have no idea who they are.

We are on the front lines here in the province of Ontario. We're trying to do our best. If you look at the recent—we've made some very good successes. It hasn't been easy to get OPSEU to come to an agreement, basically, to a zero increase. The physicians came to an agreement—that was very, very difficult. We did come to that agreement with the physicians of Ontario. But AMAPCEO, and also three of the five major teachers' unions, have agreed to hold the line. So at least there's very good progress. It's not what it should be, but at least there is definite progress.

I would think, at this time, to implement this really draconian, interventionist, government-does-everything plan of "Zap, your wages are freezing" isn't going to work. The member from Thornhill knows that's not what government is about. They shouldn't be regulating people's daily wages. That's not their job.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Just before I begin, I would say the thing that's draconian around this place is the size of debt that this government is running up. That's what's so draconian.

Speaker, I'm pleased to rise in the House today to offer my perspective on Bill 5, An Act to freeze compensation for two years in the public sector. My colleague has introduced this bill. It's a responsible approach. We have a responsibility to the taxpayers in this province to get Ontario back on track, back to fiscal health.

I often think about the McGuinty-Wynne Liberals. They inherited a province that was prosperous, and unfortunately, they're leaving Ontario a disaster.

As many of the members in this House are aware, in Ontario it's very difficult to get a job in the private sector. Many men and women across the province are waking up each morning without a job to go to, and if they have a job, they are often struggling to make ends meet. At a time like this, when the economy is screeching to a halt—in fact, this morning almost 600,000 men and

women woke up without a job—government needs to be investing its money into creating jobs and growing Ontario's economy and investing in things that are important to Ontarians, like health care and education.

When I talk about the economy screeching to a halt, I think about January job numbers: 48,000 people in the private sector, in January, lost their jobs. That's 73 months that the unemployment rate in Ontario has been higher than the national average. The Liberal decisions over the last 10 years are killing jobs in the province, running up the debt and are leading Ontario down a very difficult path and a very dangerous path.

The Liberal government should be doing everything they can to eliminate the deficit and to eliminate the debt. This would ensure that they are attracting investment to the province, which is essential for creating jobs for this generation and the next.

This legislation calls for a two-year broader public sector legislated wage freeze. This will save the province \$2 billion each year. That extra money could go a long way to reducing the debt, growing our economy and creating jobs.

As many members in our caucus have said over the last week and a half, we are in the middle of the greatest jobs crisis in our province's history and the greatest debt crisis in our history. In fact, there was a report out a couple weeks ago showing that by fiscal year 2019-20, the debt in the province of Ontario is going to hit \$550 billion.

Speaker—you'll know this very well—the blame, the responsibility, lies at the feet of this Liberal government. We can't begin to control costs without putting a temporary brake on a range of out-of-control costs. This is the best thing for this province right now and for Ontario families.

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As I've said many times in this House, I come from a small business background, and it's because of my business background that I would like to offer a small business perspective to Bill 5.

Speaker, people in business know that when times are tough, when your profits aren't there, you have to make tough decisions to rein in costs. A government isn't much different than that. The size and cost of government today in the province of Ontario has grown far beyond the ability of Ontario families to pay, so I strongly support this bill. I would encourage all of my colleagues in this House to recognize the responsibility that they have, and that's to get the books back in balance here in the province of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'm happy to stand up today and speak to Bill 5, the Comprehensive Public Sector Compensation Freeze Act.

Speaker, I think we all agree that there have been tough times in Ontario and we're facing economic challenges in Ontario, but how we approach those economic challenges is how I'd like to speak to it, because it has to

be balanced. When the member originally talked about jobs—that's what I was going to talk about. We talk about how bad things are and how everybody has got to tighten their belts and how the broader public sector employees have to have a wage freeze and how teachers had to have a wage freeze and how it's horrible that our economy is in this state, but workers have to take the brunt of it.

But we need to talk about job creation because when people are working, that's when we're stimulating our economy. That's when people who are working are supporting our economy, their communities and their neighbourhoods. They're spending their money. They're paying their taxes, Speaker. They're going out to restaurants, to support their local restaurants. They're going to their local hardware stores. The member here used to own a hardware store. If they don't have a job, they're not going to fix the roof on their house. They're not going to do their painting and renovations. They're not going to stimulate the economy.

When Ontarians have jobs, that's when we're going to have a better fiscal health checkup, so we need to make sure we have a plan for those jobs. Part of that, Speaker, is, we talked about our First Start for youth, and I think that's a great way to get the economy stimulated. Youth in Ontario last year was at 182,000 for unemployment. That is too high a number. When you're just coming out of university, when you're young and you want to look to the future, those kinds of unemployment rates are quite unmotivating and discouraging for young people. We need to look at ways to stimulate young people between the ages of 20 and 26 to look for work with good, sustainable jobs so they can contribute back to the economy.

Speaker, these are tough times. There's no doubt about it. We all agree that we're facing economic challenges here. But when we ask people to take their fair share, we also have to talk about that this government has misused some of the public purse's money, and having scandals like eHealth and Ornge and cancelling gas plants and misusing the public funds that way is a bit of a travesty. Then we turn around and we say that public sector workers have to take the hit for a two-year wage freeze, or we have to ask teachers to take their two-year wage freeze.

They talked about this in the throne speech: fair. It's got to be a fair society. This has got to be a fair approach. The fair approach is also asking corporations, big banks, to put in their fair share, to contribute to helping the economy get to a healthy state. One of the proposals that we have made is to close corporate tax loopholes.

Having said that, Speaker, we also talked about how, when you look at management bonuses, right now, with our Ontario public service management bonuses, there are 8,700 Ontario public service managers. Out of that, 8,000—sorry; let's see here. I've got my figures wrong. There are 8,900 Ontario public service managers, and of those, 8,700 received bonuses in 2011. So if you translate into percentages, that's 98% of eligible Ontario public service managers who received bonuses that year. When

you talk about a bonus, you think of it as a performance issue, right? You've done a great job, so you get a reward. But when you look at that, were 98% of Ontario public service managers such high performers that they got that kind of bonus?

So it's very difficult, when you're talking about bonuses that total approximately \$3.5 million in 2011 and you're asking public sector workers to take a wage freeze, that's not a fair theme that was talked in throne speech. I just want to put that out there—

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Thirty-five million dollars.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Correction: \$35 million. Thank you to my colleague.

So, when we're talking about fairness, we have to look at a holistic approach. It's not the workers who are going to take the brunt of it. It's not going to be the corporations that take the brunt of it. We all have to contribute to that, and that's what is going to make society healthy.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Hon. David Zimmer: I want to speak to this bill, brought by the member opposite for Thornhill. I'm rather surprised that he's bringing forward a bill for a pay freeze in the public sector. He's made great sound and fury over there that this is needed to rein in the public sector. I made a note of his remarks. He said, "The public sector is out of control and needs to be reined in," hence his private member's bill.

But, as usual, when we're introducing a piece of legislation, it is always a good thing, once in a while, to have a look at the facts that go behind the initiative to introduce a public sector pay freeze. Here are a couple of important facts to consider when reflecting or deciding whether or not we should support his bill.

Fact number one: The fact is that public sector pay increases, in the last 12 months, have averaged 0.2%. That's hardly—hardly—public sector wages out of control that need to be reined in.

Second fact: Through this government working in partnership with the unions, we have already reached wage agreements with the OMA, the Ontario Medical Association; AMAPCEO, the professional employees' group within the public service union; OPSEU; three of the five unions representing school workers; and we are making progress with OSSTF and other teachers' unions. Those two facts just by themselves hardly support the idea that public sector wages are out of control.

Secondly, there's a legal problem here. The Supreme Court of Canada has said that with unions and collective agreements, you have to go through a period of sitting down with them and negotiating in good faith. If you don't go through the process of sitting down with the union, whether it's—well, any of the public sector unions—and negotiating with them in good faith, and you do try to impose wage control, that will probably be held unconstitutional, as happened in British Columbia, where the Supreme Court of Canada said that a piece of BC legislation that just tore up the collective agreement and imposed wage freezes and so on was unconstitutional.

because the government had skipped this requirement of sitting down and negotiating in good faith.

What was the result of that? Well, at the end of the day, BC taxpayers had to retroactively pay about \$85 million to about 9,000 affected workers. What the court said, in effect, was that that could have all been avoided had the government of British Columbia just sat down and acted on its constitutional responsibilities to negotiate with the unions in good faith.

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In summary, the two problems with this bill are (1) there isn't a crisis. Public sector wages are not out of control—0.2%. (2) We've already got settlements in place, and we've shown that if we sit down and negotiate on a very principled basis, we can reach agreements that meet the requirements of the government, recognizing its fiscal constraints.

Of course, the third issue, to summarize it, is what the member opposite is introducing. If it was successful and his private member's bill passed, it would work its way up to the Supreme Court and it would get just all ripped apart by the Supreme Court, for the same reasons they ripped apart the British Columbia government's initiative to skip the requirement for collective bargaining in good faith.

So one wonders why the member opposite from Thornhill is bringing forward this bill. Well, I think, and I don't mean to be disrespectful, the fact of the matter is that he's got a headline-grabber here, because tomorrow morning in the Star and in the Globe and Mail and in the Sun and in the papers up in your riding, up Thornhill way, there will be big, big stories about the member for Thornhill, who is trying to rein in a profligate public sector. The only thing is, I urge those newspapers, when they write the story, that they think of those facts: 0.2%, which is not public sector wages out of control; a history of this government negotiating in good faith with a variety of unions and realizing its goals of respecting the fiscal constraints they are in; and thirdly, what he's doing is illegal.

Thank you, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'm pleased to rise and speak in favour of this vital bill.

I first of all want to sound out the alarm bells. Ontario is in a fiscal crisis. In case you didn't hear that, Ontario is in a fiscal crisis.

Interjections.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I think the members across the way, Speaker, are calling out that they want raises or something. I just can't quite hear what they are saying, but you're not getting a raise.

A recent Fraser Forum report has compared Ontario unfavourably to California and Greece. The studies show that despite California having a population three times the size of Ontario's, Ontario's outstanding debt is almost twice as large. In fact, our interest payments, as a percentage of revenue, are 8.9%, as opposed to 2.8% in California.

Another unfavourable indicator is the fact that our debt, as a percentage of GDP, is 37%—the exact same level as Greece in 1984. The Drummond report has indicated that if bold action is not taken, our debt-to-GDP ratio will rise over 50%; our overall debt will hit \$400 billion.

I want the members opposite to really consider these statistics, because for the past year they have been avoiding taking the necessary action to solve these problems. I want the members opposite to understand the urgency of our fiscal problems. The economic future of our province is at stake. The longer we delay, the further we dig ourselves into this hole, the harder it will be to dig ourselves out. You need to stop mortgaging our children's future. It is not fair to continue to borrow from future generations so that we may fuel the government's out-of-control spending.

It takes courage to pursue the kind of action that is necessary when facing this crisis. I'm proud to say that the PC Party has courageously advocated several measures and initiatives that would curb government spending and put Ontario back on the path to prosperity.

Today we are here debating a measure that would begin a sensible set of cost-saving measures. An across-the-board public sector wage freeze would save the province a much-needed \$2 billion. When it comes to balancing the budgets and reducing costs, it makes sense to begin with the public sector. Public sector compensation costs 55 cents of every dollar spent by the government. It is the single largest item the government spends money on. Finding savings in this aspect of our public finances represents a big step in the direction of fiscal prudence and restraint.

Beyond that, the level of public compensation far exceeds that of the people in the private sector, who ultimately foot the bill. The Fraser Institute notes that wages of public sector workers are 14% greater than those of private sector workers. The CFIB notes that the figure is closer to 27%, when considering all benefits. This is simply not fair. From a moral perspective, people working in comparable professions should not experience such a wage disparity. But there are some obvious economic reasons for why this statistic is so troubling. First, it distorts our labour markets. It used to be that those who did seek employment in the public sector did so because the hours are generally more reasonable and they have greater job security. Consequently, the labour market would assess the discount on your wage in return for these benefits. It was accepted that those in the private sector would earn more due to the increased risk associated with uncertain job security and other factors. At a 27% premium, the public sector distorts the labour market by discouraging employment in the private sector. Make no mistake, Speaker: It's the health of our private sector that ultimately determines the health of our economy.

The second troubling insight about this wage disparity is what it indicates. A study by the European Commission found the labour markets of a number of European countries—they found that private sector workers in

Germany, France and Denmark, some of Europe's strongest economies, earn more than those in the public sector. However, distressed economies, Greece, Portugal and Spain, experienced the opposite. In fact, public sector workers in Greece earned about 31% more than their private sector counterparts. This is frighteningly similar to the degree of wage disparity in Ontario, and we need to take action soon.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I don't have long, Mr. Speaker, but I did want to respond to a couple of points that the speaker just before me from the Progressive Conservatives made. If austerity budgets worked—and he pointed to Greece—then Greece would be in great shape. If austerity budgets worked, then so would Spain and Italy. This is far from the case.

Certainly from Roosevelt's New Deal law, we know the trickle-down theory of economics: You make the rich very rich—which is what's happening in this province—and somehow that wealth will just trickle down to the people at the bottom. It never worked and it won't ever work. We see south of the border right now the huge debate about the cuts and how they are going to then spiral the American economy into a recession. Austerity does not work. That is what the PCs are proposing.

He mentions Germany and other very highly unionized countries. Of course they're doing well in the private sector there, because their private sectors are unionized; because, quite frankly, the unions brought us the middle class. That's how we got a middle class in the first place. That's how we got any good labour laws: unions. This idea of union bosses—these are democratic organizations elected by their members.

If we want a balanced approach to a balanced budget, we look at the corporations and their loopholes. We look at the wealthy and the little amount of tax that they pay. We look at the managers in the public service, not the workers. We look at the incredible bonuses being paid to those managers in the OPS, not to their workers. Finally, what we do is we enable people to make a decent living so that they can then spend money, and that spurs the economy. That's kind of economics 101.

That's why the NDP, when in government, has the best record of balanced budgets, historically, in Canada, of any of the parties, because we actually pay attention to economics and not just to bookkeeping.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. John O'Toole: I want to commend, to the members listening, the remarks made by the member from Thornhill. It's important to put this debate in perspective. The deficit in Ontario is \$12 billion, and the third-highest expenditure is the servicing of our accumulated debt, which is \$236 billion. That amounts, as I look at some of the young people here today, to \$17,900 worth of debt for every man, woman and child. That's deferred taxes—that's exactly what it is—and they keep spending recklessly.

The member from Elgin–Middlesex–London said that there's a completely disproportionate relationship to the public sector and the private sector. I think he made the point that the difference between the public sector and the private sector in comparable jobs is 14%, and when you factor in the benefit plans, it's as high as 27%. It gives you some reflection on just how bad and out of balance this system of the public sector is.

Now, when you look at the current discussion with the teachers, the increase in income for a teacher from 2003 to the current time has been 25% in pay. It's even greater for the ones who are higher on the grid. I want to put it in perspective in a broader sense. The member from Thornhill, I think, did a very, very respectable summary in the short time he was allowed. But 17%—almost one in five people working now work for the government in some role: police, fire, ambulance, doctor, nurse, professor etc. People working in the public sector shouldn't be criticized.

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Here's what has happened: It's the government's policies that are wrong. The public sector—whether they're professors, teachers, nurses—do respectable work, and it should be reflected in the growth in the economy. They shouldn't be getting wage increases that are in excess of the growth and the revenue of the economy.

And here's the issue: Don Drummond—he's a very respected economist—said that Ontario has a structural deficit. Their spending is increasing faster than the growth in revenue.

Here's the final remark in the benefits to the public sector. In an article this week in the paper, it said that when you look at pensions, in the public sector, 76% plus of people have a defined benefit plan, and in the private sector, it's 25%.

Now, what does that mean? Here's what it means in the public sector—and this is another article in the paper this week. It said that a person working until 55 in the public sector who is on the sunshine list, making over \$100,000 a year—and by the way, the number on the sunshine list has gone from 20,000 to 80,000—that person who retires at 55 and lives to be actuarially 84 would receive an additional \$2 million—and not working.

Interjection: Each person.

Mr. John O'Toole: Each person would receive \$2 million. Put these things in perspective and just ask yourself the question, not in any malicious way: Is it sustainable? Well, ask Greece, when they're trying to reduce the entitlements. That's the problem across the world: It's the bureaucracy and the growth in employment in the public sector, when we talk about 600,000 families without a job. And they're the ones that create the tax revenue stream. I put to you that the current model is not sustainable.

The member from Thornhill and Tim Hudak have put a suggestion on the board, and that's a public sector wage freeze which would save \$2 billion. No one gets hurt. I ask for their support.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Thornhill, you have two minutes for a reply.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Thank you very much, Speaker. There were a number of speakers, and I would ordinarily thank them all individually, but I'll thank you collectively, because notwithstanding the fact that we all come to this place with our individual opinions and our differently-informed points of view, the input is appreciated.

I want to correct something that seems to be out there, based on the comments that I've heard. This is not a complex bill, and it's not about a lot of things that seem to be imputed to it. It is about correcting an imbalance, and that's about all it's about: correcting an imbalance.

I spent an incredible amount of my 12-minute presentations talking about the fact that the unions themselves preach a level playing field when they're fighting for their members and negotiating collective agreements. Basically, I've never argued with anybody about playing on a level playing field; nobody does. But when it tilts this way and the ball is always running in one direction, you have to question it.

For many years, perhaps unions had a point in the public sector when they said, "We need some redress." That redress has long since passed, and we now have quoted plenty of statistical information that has its basis in StatsCan material, that says, yes, there is an imbalance, and that imbalance is in favour of public sector workers, and it is being carried on the backs of ordinary taxpayers, who have been hurt just as much and now are being hurt worse.

Very particularly, to the comments of my friend from Parkdale-High Park: Look, there are three things that came out in what she said that are patently untrue in terms of my intent. One is, I don't engage in union-bashing. As I said, I've been a member of a union myself, and I have great respect for everybody who works in the broader public sector.

This is not about cutting anything, and it's not about austerity. It's about putting the brakes on for a little while and letting that playing field come back into balance. That's all it's about. That's why we want the breather. That's what this bill purports to do: Give the government a breather.

We want this government—and if not this government, then our government—to fix it, and that's what we're going to do.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. We will take the vote at the end of private members' business.

**LIQUOR LICENCE
AMENDMENT ACT (SERVING LIQUOR
IN CERTAIN PLACES), 2013**

**LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT
LA LOI SUR LES PERMIS D'ALCOOL
(SERVICE D'ALCOOL
DANS CERTAINS LIEUX)**

Mrs. Albanese moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 8, An Act to amend the Liquor Licence Act in relation to serving liquor in certain places / Projet de loi 8, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les permis d'alcool relativement au service d'alcool dans certains lieux.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for her presentation.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: It's an honour to rise in the House today for the second reading of my private member's bill, Bill 8, the Liquor Licence Amendment Act (Serving Liquor in Certain Places), 2013. I had the opportunity of introducing this bill in the past session and I'm trying again.

This bill is the result of much consultation and input from my community, York South-Weston, specifically on booze cans. I would like to especially thank the two city councillors of York South-Weston: first of all, Frances Nunziata, who is a councillor for ward 11 in the city of Toronto and with whom I've worked very closely on this issue. Welcome to Queen's Park, Frances.

I would also like to introduce Staff Sergeant Daryle Gerry and Sergeant Steve Lorriman of 12 Division, Toronto Police Service. Welcome to Queen's Park. These are all people who are very dedicated to combating the dangers these places present to our community.

I also wanted to mention that Councillor Nunziata last June presented a motion, seconded by Councillor Josh Colle, at Toronto city council that was passed, and I would like to thank them for that. The motion was in support of my bill.

Our former superintendent of 12 Division, now Deputy Chief Mark Saunders, also deserves gratitude for both his time and support towards this bill. His input and that of other members of 12 Division has been crucial in forming this bill.

Before I continue, I would also like to clarify for all of you what is a booze can. Booze cans are places where alcohol is served illegally, either an establishment that has a licence and then proceeds to sell alcohol after permitted hours, or an establishment that does not possess a liquor licence. This could be your local neighbourhood restaurant or bar operating after hours, or, as is often the case in my riding, the back room of a hair salon or perhaps a music store. Fortunately, not many ridings in Ontario have hair salons that are open at 2 a.m. every night of the week. Well, we do. And sometimes these businesses act as a front for booze cans. Again, I make the example of a music store that after business hours will close its doors and only let trusted clientele inside. They're sort of like the speakeasies of the 1920s, where a password would get you in, and inside, liquor was being sold illegally. The owners of such establishments usually claim they're throwing a private birthday party. It's therefore very difficult for the police to gain entry to such booze cans in order to collect the necessary information that is needed for a warrant.

These establishments then go on to become a public nuisance for the residents, for the businesses, who complain about the noise that they emit and the fire

hazard that they pose. For the patrons, it's also a hazard because they are usually crammed in very small rooms.

But the alcohol and the noise are not the main issues here. The problem that we are facing in York South-Weston and other ridings is that these booze cans attract a criminal element for quick money. So they are magnets for gang members, drug trafficking, sometimes prostitution or gun violence, and they affect negatively the quality of life for area residents by making them feel unsafe near their own homes.

The new superintendent of 12 Division, Douglas Quan, confirms that the Toronto Police Service dedicates a great deal of personnel and resources in response to acts of violent crime. Their experience demonstrates that many of the crimes of sudden gun violence to which police respond occur at or in close proximity to these types of locations where alcohol is being sold illegally. Also, many incidents of extreme violence occur at known locations being operated by persons with or without a licence or a special occasion permit.

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We only need to look back—as I had the opportunity to mention just today, a few hours ago here in the House—just a few days, to February 24 of this year, to see how true Superintendent Quan's words are. Shots rang out at an after-hours club on February 24 in North York, here in Toronto, ending the life of a 25-year-old man.

Allow me to go into the details of Bill 8. As we all know, the Liquor Licence Act regulates the licensing and the possession of alcohol in the province of Ontario. It already sets out the offences and the penalties for infractions of the act, such as selling to minors or selling liquor after hours. However, the Liquor Licence Act needs more teeth.

My bill amends it in two ways. First, it creates a new offence of serving liquor in any place other than a residence, premises with a liquor licence or a private place, as defined by the regulations. This is important, because it will help the police address those booze cans that are run in establishments like a hairdresser's salon. Once a business closes its doors to its customers, it practically becomes a private place. This is why the police have difficulty prosecuting those booze cans that masquerade as private parties at a salon.

As I mentioned previously, these establishments are often very difficult to infiltrate. Often, the doorman will only let in the people that he knows and he trusts, or that are brought in by trusted friends, making the job of the police to get inside, undercover, extremely difficult. In order to prove that an offence is taking place under the current provisions of the Liquor Licence Act, a police officer needs to get inside and document, over and over, that alcohol is being sold, and identify who is who within this establishment. It can take months to gather the necessary evidence.

With this amendment, it would be an offence to serve alcohol at such so-called private parties, making it much easier to shut down these operations. Again, I want to

repeat: Truly private places like homes and backyards will not be affected by this amendment. Neither will legitimate operators operating within a liquor licence.

Secondly, Bill 8 provides for penalties and bail conditions relating to the new offence, and a similar offence under the regulations. Many of the people running booze cans can be repeat offenders; if they are caught running a booze can one day, they will often set up shop somewhere else, two doors down, the next day. They may, for example, not sell alcohol directly, but then become the doorman or the manager of the place, and the offender may have a brother or a friend selling the alcohol while they continue to bring their trusted clientele with them.

If passed, an individual caught illegally selling or serving alcohol will now be subject to more stringent bail conditions. If this person is then caught again, procuring or being in possession of alcohol for the intent of traffic or being on premises where alcohol is illegally served or sold, the offender would be liable for additional penalties, and it would be possible to immediately suspend an establishment's liquor licence for at least seven days.

This piece of legislation is important for making communities safer. Since I've been elected, in 2007, there have been a number of very disturbing incidents of violence in my riding. I just want to mention a few. In February of 2011, a man was shot in the head in a small shop at Weston and Lawrence. In early 2009, there was a shooting in a suspected booze can that claimed the life of a man, and two others were injured. In 2008, a man was convicted for the 2006 murder of a young father, shot at close range in a booze can.

The dangers posed by booze cans can also spill out onto the streets and affect innocent bystanders. Last year, in March, a man stumbled out of a booze can around 3:30 on a Sunday morning and fired at least four shots at a condo building in my riding, at 1 Hickory Tree Road. People were just astonished. They were shocked at having shots at their window. You can just imagine the fear of some of the constituents.

Community members in York South-Weston have been working together with Councillor Nunziata, the police and city staff to address the issues of problem properties for years, holding monthly meetings and safety audits, in which I participate as well.

Bill 8 was conceived in this context: as a more effective tool for police to use in truly eradicating this problem. A booze can may already be illegal, but if police don't have the proper tools to deter and eliminate them in York South-Weston, in Trinity-Spadina, in York Centre, in Davenport, in Ajax, in Barrie or anywhere else in the province, they are just going to continue to flourish.

I want to mention this: In 2011 in Trinity-Spadina, the police shut down a place where 200 people were crammed in. It was a yoga studio. At night, it turned into a booze can. That's why it's important to keep away repeat offenders even from the premises of booze cans.

The further tragedy is that so many of the lives that are lost to violence at booze cans are those of our youth. That

is why I've been working on developing an integrated local strategy, along with community groups, our government, other levels of government and local agencies. This bill represents one part of that goal—to prevent and deter crime—but this doesn't pull me away from my focus on another very necessary part of the strategy. I'm working to better connect our youth to employment, to training, to recreational opportunities so they don't end up involved in booze cans and possible other criminal activities in the first place.

I hope that I have painted a sufficient picture of the need for this bill. I can assure you that the intent is not to penalize good operators or to unduly punish first-time offenders or otherwise legitimate establishments. This bill is not about shutting down a restaurant or withdrawing a licence because its last patron was sold a drink at 2:15 a.m. This bill is meant truly to empower so that we can keep our community safer. It's about making sure that a small group intent on operating a criminal enterprise can't bring their crime and their clientele into our wonderful neighbourhoods. Urban ridings need this. The city of Toronto is probably unique in Canada: It has a third generation of gang culture.

I strongly believe it's the right thing to do. I hope that my colleagues opposite will be supporting this bill, even though they're not facing, perhaps, the same conditions in their own riding.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I'm pleased to speak this afternoon as the Progressive Conservative Attorney General critic to debate Bill 8, An Act to amend the Liquor Licence Act in relation to serving liquor in certain places.

Bill 8, of course, is a recent reintroduction by the member for York South-Weston, and I first want to congratulate the member for taking the time to craft a private member's bill that focuses on attempting to make Ontario's communities safer. Certainly, this is a cause we can agree on, Speaker.

Bill 8 seeks to curb the illegal sale and service of alcohol and the operation of what is known as booze cans by giving police the tools they need, and have asked for, to deter offenders and keep communities safe.

If passed, Bill 8 would create a series of strong potential bail conditions an officer may impose upon an offender, including not being able to attend certain places that liquor is served; not being able to attend where liquor is licensed to be sold outside of prescribed hours; not being able to possess, except at their own residence, more liquor than is deemed reasonable for their personal use; and any other condition that officers in charge consider necessary to prevent re-offence. I think this is an important part of what the member opposite is trying to do because, as she raised in her own speech, it's often the same people reoffending in different locations, so you need to do more than simply target the individual locations.

The bill also establishes a new measure which states that offenders under the newly created offence are liable to imprisonment for repeat offences.

As I mentioned earlier, the motivation for this legislation is community safety and promoting a sense of security for residents within their homes and on our streets. I applaud the fact that Bill 8 is aimed at illegal operators and is meant to be a deterrent to behaviour that detracts from our community's sense of safety.

I do have a few concerns, however, and I'm sure that they will be addressed or can be addressed at committee. For example, I'm concerned that by strengthening the penalties so much, we risk the fact that first-time offenders and otherwise good operators could find themselves in a situation of non-compliance. We must be careful not to capture legal operators and penalize them unnecessarily without the opportunity for them to come into full compliance, as most first-time offenders usually do.

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That being said, I do feel these concerns can be adequately addressed at the committee stage. Moreover, I think the cause for making our communities safer and stopping these booze cans from endangering our families and communities is a worthwhile one. It is also worth noting that the Toronto Police Service believes Bill 8 would help in combatting these dangerous booze cans and make our communities safer in the process.

In closing, I would just like to note that these booze cans are about much more than just the illegal sale of alcohol. These places often become hot spots for other illegal activities and crimes, including shootings and, most tragically, deaths. It is for these reasons and more that I will be supporting Bill 8 this afternoon. I'm looking forward to its further refinement at committee. Congratulations.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's a pleasure to rise. This is one of my favourite times: private members' public business. I think it's all of ours. I'm hopeful too in this term, and this is generally speaking, that some of these bills actually see fruition and that we get them passed into law. I know we're working at that at House leaders', but it has been a long time coming so let's hope it comes this session.

To the member from York South-Weston, I completely understand—and to the guests, to Frances and to 12th division, welcome to Queen's Park—the concern behind this bill. Certainly, in my riding we have concerns. I live about two doors from Queen Street in the west end of Toronto in Parkdale, and our problem is not so much booze cans or illegal operations; our problem are quite legal operations that oversell, that don't pay attention to either the spirit or the letter of the law, and where some parts of Queen Street are rendered uninhabitable, especially for women after dark, because you've got overserving; you've got knife fights; you've got all sorts of problems that come with overserving, at that end of the street.

I have to tell you that I'm meeting with my own division this week, 11th division, and also with, I hope,

the AGCL—what is it? AGCO? I always get the acronym wrong—the Alcohol and Gaming Commission this week as well, because I'm frustrated. These are legal establishments. We've had problems with them, and we've dealt with them and with problem properties for month after month. But here's the problem, and this is with legal establishments: I've been told by the police that you have to catch them in action. You have to actually catch the crime. If they're overserving, you have to catch them overserving. If they're serving underage, you have to catch them serving underage, or you have to have the methods to set up a kind of vice sting, which not all divisions have the time or the money to do over something that, quite frankly, in the great scheme of things, is a more minor offence, to actually be able to charge the owners with doing anything wrong at all. Ditto the liquor commission. They say, "Where is the evidence? Show us the evidence before we can pull their licence." That's where I'm starting; I'm starting with the legal establishments—difficult enough to get action on these files, and I understand that.

When it comes to illegal actions, "Good luck" is all I'm saying to the member opposite. We're going to pass this on. We think it absolutely should go to committee. There is some fine-tuning, as the Progressive Conservatives have pointed out, that we'd like to see as well, but certainly there's enough merit in the bill that we need to move it on.

My concern is more with the entire area of how you get a liquor licence, what happens after you get it, and how that's policed. The whole area is rife with problems. If we have to depend on our police forces to enforce what really shouldn't be their role—overserving, serving underage and things like that in legal establishments—then, good grief; good luck with the illegal establishments.

I have some concerns, and I just wanted to note them so that the member can make a note of them; for example, something else that happens along Queen Street that's a very good thing, which is openings and art galleries. Here, you have art galleries. Their job is not ever to sell liquor, but they have openings at regular times. They have to get a licence for that. I would hate to see organizations—small business. Lord knows, we need our small business, and we're not a particularly hospitable environment right now in Ontario or in Toronto for small business. We need our small business to thrive. I would hate to see establishments that aren't strictly restaurants or bars but do get liquor permits being penalized in any way, shape or form.

Ditto, I'm concerned a little bit about some minorities in our community that love to party, and their parties tend to go on longer and they tend to be louder; let's face it. I can say this because my last name is DiNovo. One of those communities, and the member opposite can appreciate this, is Italians.

Again, I'm concerned that first-time offenders get caught in a net that's really meant for clearly illegal oper-

ations that are ongoing—so just to make sure that that's looked at.

The other, wider issue is with any law that's penalty-based; that is to say, if it's all about the punishment, it's very difficult to deter practice, right? If it's all about catching them first and then hammering them with a punishment, people tend to be pretty short in terms of their memory. I appreciate that, yes, if these places are getting a slap on the wrist, they'll be up and running tomorrow, but on the other hand, just because they're given a larger fine doesn't mean that they won't be up and running tomorrow as well. That's just a more, if you will, philosophical problem with a kind of penalty-based response to this.

Some of the issues that the member raised—I'm also kind of wondering how this is going to work well. If it's difficult to get in—the doorman's there; they know the undercover police officer isn't one of their regular members—I mean, you still have the problem of enforcement. Again, I point back to my original issue: We can't even enforce our liquor laws with legal establishments, never mind with illegal ones.

Certainly, I think that there's no problem in moving this bill on.

The other comments that I would really like to make, though, are more about the situation that finds young people ending up in booze cans, and that certainly is true of York South-Weston. Again, we hate to see victims penalized.

The folk who hang out in booze cans, let's face it, are not doctors and lawyers, usually—maybe way downtown; maybe in Trinity-Spadina, but certainly not in York South-Weston or in Parkdale. These are not high-earning individuals who hang out there. A lot of them are kids. A lot of them are kids from various minorities. This speaks, again, to the high rates of poverty, the high rates of joblessness among our youth. The member alluded to it briefly, but truly, that's the backdrop to this. Quite frankly, that's a far more important focus for this House than higher and stiffer penalties for illegal establishments serving alcohol.

I really do plead not just with the member but with the entire government bench: Isn't it about time we did something about youth joblessness? Isn't it about time we did something about youth poverty, which is getting worse and worse and worse?

We just had a stat come out last week from both McMaster University and also from the United Way, saying that precarious employment now affects all workers. In fact, it affects about 40% to 50% of workers. Some 40% to 50% of all workers in the GTA say they don't know if they'll have a job next year. This is not the kind of atmosphere in which we want to raise our children.

So if we want to protect our children and protect folk who live in areas that have a high rate of impoverishment, a high rate of marginalization, we don't want to just punish them when they mess up, Mr. Speaker. We want to find ways to prevent that mess-up in the first place.

That's what is not only lacking in this bill; it's also lacking in the Liberal government's response and the way they're going about business. We're not seeing, for example, policies to create jobs. We're not seeing absolutely specific methods of attacking poverty. We're not seeing ways of keeping kids in post-secondary education.

We have the highest, most expensive tuition in Canada right now, the highest student debt in Canada right now. So if you're going to say to a young person, "Why are you hanging out and partying all the time? Why don't you go back to school?"—it's very, very difficult to say that when there's just no way that they can afford it.

We heard today, with Campaign 2000 and child poverty, a young woman describe her arduous adventure in trying to get a post-secondary education while trying to find daycare for her child and trying desperately to get off social assistance. These are statistics waiting to happen. This is the problem.

Certainly, illegal establishments selling liquor aren't the solution, and certainly, neither is this bill. That's really a point that needs to be made, that attacking the symptom of a problem is not attacking the problem itself.

1510

So yes, in short, does the New Democratic Party think this is a bill with some merit that should go on to committee? Absolutely. We're going to vote for it, and we're going to put forward our recommendations for amendments at that time, although I'd love to hear the member speak to those suggestions.

Again, to the two larger issues: One, on the larger issue of enforcement—trust me; I'm speaking to police and the liquor commission as we meet here—how do you enforce these laws generally, even in legal establishments? The situation we have now is not working. It hasn't worked in the seven years I've been elected. I've heard complaints from my residents constantly about legal establishments and still can't seem to get them shut down, even though they break the law every week. That's number one.

Number two, the larger backdrop to this bill: the backdrop of youth unemployment, high tuition fees, increasing poverty among our young and what we do about that. If we do something about that, we won't have quite the problem of youth acting out in dangerous and illegal ways that we do. We can't expect our police and our bureaucrats to be social workers. We do expect it of them, actually, and we shouldn't have to, but we do expect it of them. We should be helping them do their jobs by actually attacking the core problems that this is a symptom of.

So, yes, thank you for bringing it forward. Yes, we will support this going forward to committee. Yes, we will propose some amendments to make it stronger. But two things: One, nothing's working in terms of the way we give licences out to establishments, legal or illegal, I might add; and two, my goodness, instead of looking at the symptoms of the underlying problem, why don't we finally, as government, look at the problem, which is

youth unemployment, youth not in school, dead-end jobs for youth and the fact our youth can't afford to go to school anymore?

Those are the problems, and for those problems, this isn't the solution.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate? The member for Scarborough—Agincourt.

Ms. Soo Wong: Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by saying that I'll be sharing my time with the members from Etobicoke Centre and Willowdale.

First, I want to thank the member from York South-Weston for her leadership and advocacy work in reintroducing this legislation to the House, because I hear, extensively, her passion, her commitment to protecting her community but, most importantly, advocacy work to make sure her community is safe.

The proposed Bill 8, if passed by the House, will address two things: hopefully reduce crime and illegal sales of alcohol after hours in her community. The member from York South-Weston talked about how this is not just in the city of Toronto; it's across Ontario.

But I think the bigger issue here is the concern about how we help our police community with respect to these kinds of crime-related incidents. We heard from the member in her remarks earlier the fact that there have been some critical incidents, there have been deaths. More importantly, how do we help the police community in terms of this whole issue of bail conditions, the whole issue of the reoffender? Because this kind of criminal activity is not just one time only; we're dealing with repeat offenders. How do we do deterrence? More importantly, the concern across the city of Toronto—I'm from the eastern part of the city—is continuous repeat offenders.

The other big concern with this particular proposed legislation is the fact we want to get the message out that if you are going to continue this kind of illegal activity and you are convicted in court, there will be sentencing attached to this kind of offence. Furthermore, we, as a community, have a responsibility in this House to ensure that every community is safe.

The comments today have been focused on urban areas exclusively. I would challenge that this is not just an urban issue; this is across Ontario. There will be incidents that involve crime, and there will be illegal sales somewhere. We need to ensure that the law enforcement community as well as the legal community have the right tools to protect and ensure that these kinds of criminal activities get reduced, if not prevented.

The other piece here: This is not the first time the House has been addressing this issue. Last year, I believe in June 2012—maybe the member could, if that's not correct, correct my dates—all three parties had supported this particular bill, and the fact is that the members opposite already indicated support for this particular bill. So I want to continue this dialogue, and I think it's the right thing to do to move this bill to the committee.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. John O'Toole: This afternoon, I want to give credit to the member from York South-Weston for bringing this bill forward again. I think it's very reasoned and well-intentioned. I enjoyed very much your comments with respect to relating your action and your decision to incidents in your community of York South-Weston. That's really why we are generally here, and I'd say in the broader sense, where you get into policy, you don't find so much accommodation in here. But often government or opposition are trying to achieve desirable outcomes, and in this case here, our critic for the Attorney General, from Dufferin-Caledon, was very complimentary as well.

I want to recognize the fact that you're working with the lower-tier municipalities, the councillors in your area of York. I have, like many others, followed some of these inappropriate outcomes at these after-hour clubs. They are just generally unacceptable.

I just want to put on the record that all of us here—and I know the Liberals, for instance, often find themselves at the National Club, a very popular hangout for notable members, and in our case, the Albany Club. Very wealthy people would find themselves after hours perhaps at the Toronto Club—not me, personally—and other clubs that are quite highly respected and where people want to have, out of camera's eye, some discussions perhaps after a regal event. But a last concern is what the hotel and restaurant association has mentioned.

I was at an event where people knew the owners of this club—they knew them—and they brought out, because it was a 50th wedding anniversary, an aged bottle of port. This was maybe 2 in the morning. This was a couple of years ago, and I won't mention the place in case the police raid the place. But I think there are occasions, and I believe that the police do have the appropriate tools—it's these repeat offenders that have been mentioned by your colleague and your caucus that we need to address. I would be, in that respect, encouraging this bill to pass and to go to committee so that the implementation mechanisms are in place.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: I, too, would like to add my support to the member from York South-Weston with the reintroduction of this bill. I think everyone has identified the fact that this is an illegal activity that is occurring and needs to be stopped.

Interestingly enough, probably the after-hour clubs started because of the hospitality industry itself ending at 2 a.m., and the hospitality folks had someplace to go. Also, interestingly enough, after-hour clubs do not have websites or they don't need to advertise; it's simply word of mouth that people seem to be able to go.

What is concerning to me is that when you listen to what the police have to say, not only could there be activities that go on within the club that are illegal, but also, there was one in particular that caught my attention where they had identified the particular club, and when

they went and knocked on the door, the door was actually chained, which means that someone could not get in, but it also meant someone could not get out.

We have had too many incidents over the last number of years where there have been extraordinary fires; many people have lost their lives. I would hate to think that we put this into our society, where we know this might happen, but we haven't put in place the necessary tools for the police in order to shut these down so this cannot happen.

So I am very supportive of the approach that the member has taken. And, yes, it is very much within her community—I suspect it's within many communities—but I think there's a broader fiduciary responsibility as a member of this House to look at how we can in fact ensure the safety of the people of Ontario. One of the ways is always to shut down illegal activity, to give the police the support that they do need in order to make sure that these activities are not occurring.

The other thing that I found fascinating was their ability to shut down and to move, and they may just move down the street—amazing.

1520

Again, I'm very supportive of the member from York South-Weston. I encourage her to make sure that this bill goes through on second reading to the appropriate committee, where it will receive the necessary public scrutiny so that we can in fact have third reading.

Thank you again to the member and thank you to everyone in this House for their support.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Rod Jackson: It's a real pleasure to rise and speak to this private member's bill again. I did it when it was introduced in the last session, and I supported it then as I will now. I do have a couple of minor concerns, and certainly some words of support for it as well.

I think it's important that any time we have an opportunity to reinforce some of the laws that are currently in place and make sure they're applied properly, we should take advantage of it. This is a case where I think we need to be careful that we're not overregulating. I don't think this is a case where it is overregulation. Sometimes we in Legislatures, whether they're provincial, federal or municipal, think we can regulate or legislate everything. I don't think this is a case where overregulation is a problem; I think it's actually identifying a very specific problem that exists, especially in larger urban areas like Toronto and the GTA, and in fact more and more in a place like Barrie. I know that as things maybe get more difficult and tighten up with rules and attention in places like Toronto, a lot of people who run these types of establishments—booze cans—move to places like Barrie, where there is less attention being paid to what the actual problem is. We do see some movement, some of this culture moving towards a place like Barrie, and it's important to make sure that the nasty things that go along with it that have already been mentioned, the other crimes that often go along with things like booze cans,

like any type of violence—even things as heinous as prostitution or other criminal activities are often bred in these places.

But that's not to say that every place that happens to stay open a little bit past—and I think it's important to note that some restaurants and hotels have mentioned that they do have some issue with the potential for the intent of this bill to be lost a little bit, and have it over-applied, say, in their cases. So if we, for example, have a hotel or a restaurant that has a bar that stays open a little too late by accident or whatever, maybe they would be punished in a way that was far more punitive than maybe deserved, especially for a first offence. If things like that are recognized and dealt with at committee—some wording of the bill may be altered in such a way that the intent is clear. I don't think when I say that that I'm going to the core of your intent, member from York South-Weston; that's not my intention. I just think it's important to be clear about the intent.

Having come from a municipal background as well, I know that quite often, bylaws and laws that we make as legislators—the intent is lost at the enforcement level. I can give examples where bylaw officers in the city of Barrie or anywhere in our country—bylaws could actually be misinterpreted and enforcement can go too far because the discretion of the bylaw officer or the officer isn't being adhered to.

I think as long as we are very careful about how we apply the law, or the amendment, and we make sure that the discretion of officers can't be mistaken and that certain businesses aren't punitively punished for maybe first-time mistakes they've made, it's a great amendment that should be supported.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Mike Colle: It's very important to speak to this bill, and I congratulate the member from York South-Weston for bringing it forward, as she has twice.

The term “booze cans” is really a bit of a misnomer. These are not your after-hours clubs; these are drug dens, places where they sell and trade guns on a regular basis. It's a place where they kill people. I know of one place on Atlas Avenue: There were two murders before they finally closed the place down. It took about eight years to do it. There was another place on St. Clair and Kenwood. I remember two people were killed at the same booze can. I don't know, it took six, seven years to finally—I don't even think they closed it; it basically went out of business because the patrons were afraid of going there and getting killed.

I've got another quasi-booze can—finally, after 10 years, we actually closed it—in Lawrence Heights: 10 years operating in a Toronto Community Housing complex, 10 years of selling booze and dope. I don't know how many people were shot and killed in front of and around this place. But for 10 years, they operated illegally, after hours, shooting people, selling guns, dope and drugs. You can't close these places down.

I had a police officer coming to me from 13 Division—as former mayor Nunziata knows—at Oakwood

and Rogers Road. This bar is still open. They found a sawed-off shotgun behind the toilet—because that's what they do; they don't carry the guns with them, these criminals. What they do is they leave them in preferred booze cans and places, and then they pick them up, and you rent a gun there or whatever you want to do.

The police officer found a sawed-off shotgun, went to the Alcohol and Gaming Commission and said, “Listen, let's suspend the licence of this place”—not even close it down.

“Well, you can't do that, because you can't prove that the owner knew that the sawed-off shotgun was in the place.”

The officer said, “Yeah, but if they sell peanuts at happy hour, you're going to suspend their licence. But if there's a sawed-off shotgun in the place: ‘Oh, no, we can't do that.’”

There is a lot out of whack with the Alcohol and Gaming Commission. They need a reality check. You have to go through hell and back to get them to close down the most notorious of places. Councillor Nunziata will tell you. You go time and time again. You go with a councillor; you go with the residents. You appear at hearings, and they bring their lawyers, and then there's some other technicality. They claim the Charter of Rights and Freedoms—the right and freedom to have a booze-can licence. You can't close them down. But the poor, ordinary guy who's running a legitimate restaurant—“Oh, you didn't put the right sign on the wall there. We're going to have to possibly—you've got to come in for a hearing, to suspend your licence.” There's a sushi place on Eglinton; they were going to close the guy down because he didn't have some sign on the wall. It is totally out of whack.

Unless you see the reality of this thing and the amount of police hours wasted, going to these hearings, filling out reports—this has been going on in economic boom times and in economic down times, so it's not the economy, folks. It's just a fact.

We in the provincial Legislature have got to pay more attention to these street issues, the real life of people and the fact that they drain our resources. They shoot and kill people. They make money under the table; it's all part of funnelling the underground crime economy we have in some of our cities. This is an attempt to deal with that reality.

Just ask the city officials at the old city of York. How many hours at metro council—staff hours—we used to have task forces. We had the city works commissioner. The fire marshal used to go in; we used to call in the fire marshal. The police—we had everybody in the city working on booze-can control. Meanwhile, we can't do the other business. So, all the money and time—on these criminals, really. They operate these criminal places under our nose. They laugh at us, this area of government.

And the poor cops: They're there, trying to do the best they can. Every day, they're there, trying to do their job. Everybody says, “Oh, the police have got to do more.”

Well, the police are caught in the middle, because every time they try to bring something to someone's attention, they say, "Well, listen, according to the Alcohol and Gaming Commission and all of these rules"—if you look at the rules—in fact, I looked at the rules, because I was trying to close this one place down on Eglinton Avenue. There are all these reasons why you can close a place down; there are about 50 of them.

I said, "How come there isn't anything here that, if someone gets shot and killed in a place, you can close it down? How come, if they find guns in the place, you can't close it down? Why isn't that one of your 50 reasons?"

Too many peanuts at happy hour, and all this stuff: They all had that down. Loud music—all those were listed there. Peanuts were right at the top. But people getting killed—"Why isn't it on the list?" I said. I even had the head of the Alcohol and Gaming Commission come in, trying to explain this nonsense to me. They can't.

It's not about a magic solution, but it is about this place spending more time on the real things that affect people, and they're not solved by big policy issues. As the member from Durham said, it's about getting your feet on the ground and doing things, rather than just talking yourselves to death about policy nonsense. Let's fix some of the problems, right?

You're from Durham; you know full well all the policy nonsense we hear around here. We need to help real people, help the police, help the community, help small business and listen to the local councillors. They're trying to do a job; we should help them try to do that job, and I think we can. I'm optimistic this will finally be a little bit of a ray of light into this long, long, sad tale of booze cans.

1530

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm pleased to join the debate on Bill 8, the Liquor Licence Amendment Act.

I want to begin by congratulating the member for YorkSouth-Weston for introducing this bill. As we have just heard from the member from Eglinton-Lawrence—and anyone who has lived in the GTA knows that for years this has cropped up, certainly as a problem. Obviously, the bill before us addresses this issue for a serious situation in Toronto, but other communities as well.

The bill seeks to address the problem of booze cans—illegal bars in which patrons can buy alcohol after legal closing hours. Booze cans are not just a problem for illegal alcohol, as many have said. They are centres for drug dealing, organized crime, prostitution and violence.

As these places operate illegally, their patrons are without any of the protections that people would expect in a normal, legal business establishment. We've even heard of cases where the doors are chained shut to keep out the police, which obviously could lead to a catastrophe if there was a fire or if there was a health

emergency. And too often, when the police manage to close down one of these operations, it just opens in a new location, not far away.

In the last few years, media reports have told us that several men have died in shootings at booze cans and police have made multiple arrests on drug and liquor charges. It is clear that the police need more help from the Legislature so that the law helps them to close these criminal activities down. I certainly support the strengthening of penalties, as current fines are considered by illegal operators as simply the cost of doing business. We need a system that doesn't allow it to be worthwhile to pay a fine and keep on operating.

I will be supporting this bill and looking forward to it going for public consultation. We have heard, for instance, from the Ontario Restaurant Hotel and Motel Association, some concerns about the manner in which the bill might be implemented, and that's exactly why committee hearings exist.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

The member for York-South Weston, you have two minutes for a reply.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank all the members who have spoken to the bill: the members from Dufferin-Caledon, Parkdale-High Park, Scarborough-Agincourt, Durham, Etobicoke Centre, Barrie, Eglinton-Lawrence and York-Simcoe. Thank you very much for your comments and for your support.

The intent of the bill, as I mentioned earlier, is not to capture legal operators, good businesses; the intent is really to target those problem establishments that some of us have spoken about.

I look forward to the opportunity to fine-tune the bill, to enlarge it, to have public consultations, so that we can make sure that those that are operating within a licence would not be affected by this bill, but the ones that are really causing the violence and the anguish in our communities would instead be able to be shut down.

I would say to the member for Parkdale-High Park that we are also, in our community, finding some establishments that are legal and have a licence and have been speaking to the AGCO, and we know that there are problems there as well. But you have to speak to your police officers, to your division, and ask them how long it takes to shut these places down. It is really mind-boggling when you hear what they have to go through.

Secondly, I want to also just highlight for a moment—you said that I spoke briefly about the larger focus of youth. Well, we are trying, and that's because that's not what this bill is about. This is about—it could be called a small building block, but it's really aimed at making a big difference in our communities. Our throne speech does speak about the opportunities that we have to offer our youth, and I've been working on that in my community as well. Thank you very much for your support.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. We'll take the vote at the end of private members' business.

JAYESH'S LAW (WORKER SAFETY
AT SERVICE STATIONS), 2013

LOI JAYESH DE 2013

SUR LA SÉCURITÉ DES TRAVAILLEURS
DANS LES STATIONS-SERVICE

Mr. Colle moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 12, An Act to amend various statutes with respect to worker safety at service stations / Projet de loi 12, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui a trait à la sécurité des travailleurs dans les stations-service.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Mike Colle: I first would like to introduce the widow of Jayesh Prajapati, Vaishali Prajapati, who's here with us, and Jayesh's son, Rishabh Prajapati, and their family friends who came in from Ajax and Scarborough: Manisha Shah, Mital Prajapati and Arvind Prajapati. Welcome.

If I could just start out, I introduced this bill before and I appreciate everybody knowing a little bit about it, but I'll just give you a bit of the background, just the story that precipitated this bill.

Jayesh Prajapati was a gas station attendant at a gas station around the corner from where I lived. One Saturday night, someone came and filled up two big red jerry cans worth of gas, filled up his SUV, and then Jayesh, who was very conscientious at his job and really took his job seriously, tried to stop the person from getting away. Unfortunately, Jayesh was run over and dragged down the street and subsequently lost his life as a result of this encounter with this person.

As a result of that, I was there trying to deal with the situation. It's right across the street from a Toronto Community Housing building, 855 Roselawn. I noticed there were a lot of the residents there and they talked about how wonderful this man was, Jayesh. Whenever they were short money for chocolate bars or coffee, he would say, "It's okay. It's okay." And this is a guy working for \$10 an hour.

I remember someone came and told me a story about someone who was trying to fill up their bicycle with air and didn't have any money to put air in the bicycle tires. He said, "Don't worry, you don't have any money. I'll do it."

Jayesh came to Canada from Gujarat in India about six years ago. He became a Canadian citizen about three years ago and was very proud to be a Canadian. He had an MA in chemistry. He was really an educated man and he was just basically unable to find work. He applied everywhere, but he did find this job at a gas station.

Jayesh worked basically from 3 o'clock in the afternoon until midnight, six days a week. And he would come by bus and subway from—he lived in Rexdale at the time—probably a couple of hours every day each way, six days a week, at \$10 an hour.

So when this occurred, and just finding out what a wonderful person he was and the fact that it was just such

a horrific tragedy—no one should have to die this way—I tried to see if I could help and tried to find out if there was anything wrong that we could fix or make better.

I found a similar situation in British Columbia, where in 2007 Grant De Patie had been dragged to his death for \$75, and they had passed a law in British Columbia in 2008 called Grant's Law, as a result of this horrific death that occurred to this young man, Grant, who worked at the gas station after school.

I also then talked to various gas station operators and owners. I talked to representatives of the oil companies. I talked to representatives of the police, convenience store representatives. I talked to just anybody who might have an idea of what we could do.

1540

I came up with a proposal, basically, to try to deal with this. It's not a perfect proposal, but at least it's an attempt to deal with this situation that is really—I never realized it was so large. In 2010, we had 10,000 reported gas-and-dashes in Ontario—10,000 reported. The police tell me there are probably double that number at least that aren't reported—the police don't record all this stuff. We could have 20,000 of these occurring in Ontario. It's a regular, daily thing.

And it's not casual people who are doing this kind of criminal act of stealing gas. The alleged person in the case of Jayesh had an 18-year criminal record—18 years of doing this stuff. He almost ran over a cop a couple years ago. He's still on the loose, by the way—the alleged person. Another alleged person ran over a gas station attendant in Mississauga a year and a half earlier. They arrested him. He went to court—slap on the wrist, house arrest. He took off to Alberta. In Alberta he was charged with all kinds of crimes. He stuck up a transit officer with a gun. He's still on the loose, because the courts don't take this seriously.

If you ask the cops, they're the biggest supporters of doing something, because they say, "We chase these people. We become collection agents for the oil companies. We have to track these people down." They get their licence plates and find out it's a stolen licence plate. They go to court. They've got a lawyer. The judges say, "Oh well, it's just theft under 5,000 bucks. Big deal. Just pay the amount and a \$100 fine. Goodbye."

So they know they can get away with this stuff, and the cops are spending a lot of time. That's why Police Chief Blair is a big supporter of my proposal, Chief Jolliffe of York region is a big supporter, Hamilton Police Chief De Caire—in Hamilton they had a huge problem a couple years ago, and they tried to do something about it.

Front-line police officers know that with the situation right now, they can't really do their job protecting gas station operators, nor can they protect the public. They're afraid of their own officers being confronted by gas thieves. It is not a victimless crime. You're not ripping off the oil or gas company—they'll say, "Well, the gas company, they're big." You're basically jeopardizing the

safety of that operator working for 10 bucks an hour or a patron who happens to be there or a police officer who has to answer. They're the victims of this kind of criminal activity. Many of these people are habitual gas thieves. They get stolen licence plates and put them on; they fill up for other people.

Therefore, I tried to find out what we can do. The thing that worked in BC—this was put forth by the government of BC, the BC Federation of Labour and the gas station industry out there—is that they put in a law that basically said you have to have prepayment. In other words, you have prepayment through a credit card or debit card. They've had a law in BC since 2008 that means you have prepayment before you get gas. It has basically stopped gas and dash completely in British Columbia; it doesn't exist.

In almost every US state, that's the norm—city ordinance or state ordinance, that's what it is. If you as a Canadian go to get gas, you have to have your credit card and you have a problem sometimes. You have to put in your zip code and then you've got to go inside. But anyway, it's all prepayment. Seventy percent of the gas we acquire right now is by prepayment, so I suggested that we put in a prepayment-type system.

In listening to people over the last number of months, I also said, this isn't a real problem that I know of in Kenora, or it's not a real problem in Kapuskasing, but it's a real problem in the big cities. Therefore, if there's a municipality that feels it's not a problem, they can opt out of it. But it is a serious problem from Ottawa to Toronto to Hamilton to Ajax. It's happening regularly.

The other thing I'm asking for is, as I said, that there's a dirty little secret in this industry, and it's that the poor guy who's making \$10 an hour—they basically have this deal where they say, "Well, if they steal from you and the guy takes off, you have to pay 50% of the cost of the gas theft." They take it out of their wages, and that's what they do. I've heard from family members and I've heard from gas station operators that this is one of the things. Not all operators do it, but it's too common a practice. That's why it risks the lives of these people, because they say, "I'm making 10 bucks an hour. Then if this guy takes off and I've got to pay that \$100 or \$200 bill, there goes most of my wages for my rent." It's a common practice that is tolerated and should be abolished. That's why in this bill I'm saying there should be heavy, strict penalties for anybody who deducts wages from these workers for gas theft. Why should a guy or a woman making 10 bucks an hour be paying for this kind of theft? That's too common and should be stopped.

The third thing I'm asking for is something that is done in a number of US states which I think would be a deterrent: If you are convicted of gas theft, you should be liable to have your licence suspended. As I said, many of these guys do it over and over again. Again, there was a guy in Scarborough last week. Since February and March, he's done about 12 stations in Scarborough. There's a guy, another guy—anyways, they're habitual,

and they get away with it. That's why you should at least suspend their licence if you can.

Those are the three recommendations that I put forward in this bill, just to try and send a serious message out that this is not something we should tolerate and accept as sort of just normal. Because right now you can imagine the thousands that occur where these people—whether they are the independent gas station operators or whether they are the station attendants, they shouldn't have to go to work every day wondering whether or not they're going to confront one of these criminals and whether or not they are going to come home at night. It's one of the most dangerous jobs there probably is right now in the city. This is crazy, that working for 10 bucks an hour I go risk my life, and what for? Certainly our oil companies are doing very well. They want to make their workplaces safe, and I told them, "You've got to do better to support these wonderful workers. You've got to put up good cameras in your gas stations, proper lighting," because sometimes they say they take the picture of the licence plate, but the pictures are so grainy they are inadmissible in court. The criminal gas thieves know that they can get away with this right now in Ontario.

That's why I say I think we should at least look at some of these suggestions I put forward to try and protect these vulnerable, marginal workers, who are usually students or people who cannot find another job but are working. They want to pay their bills. They are trying their best to make a living here in our city. So let's try and look at these suggestions.

Again, the Ontario association of police chiefs supports my bill, and the CAA supports this bill, because they know—they get these reports—this is too common. These criminals are laughing at us, that they get away with this kind of stuff. Our families that go to work and their brothers and sisters that go to work shouldn't have to be putting up with this kind of violent criminal activity with no punishment or no accountability.

Thank you for listening.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Randy Hillier: I'm pleased to speak on Bill 12. I do want to give a bit of a different perspective, a perspective from a rural member, on this bill.

I want to speak in favour of the intention of this bill. Let me be clear: No employee of a gas station should have their pay taken from them, their property and their hard work diminished, because of someone stealing gasoline. But we should also be clear on the law as it stands today. Even the member for Eglinton–Lawrence admits it's already illegal to charge an employee for stolen gas. And I'm sure, as most members are, especially those from urban Ontario, most gas stations already require prepayment. So the bill in effect has redundancy in it. It recriminalizes something that is already criminal, something already in our labour code.

Again, I want to emphasize that the bill is well-intentioned. So what will be the actual effect of this

legislation? From a rural perspective, it will make jobs of gas station attendants and owners more difficult in rural Ontario. Though I know many members may forget that Toronto is not the entire province, I might want to remind them just how we do things in rural Ontario.

The gas station where I buy my gas is Donaldson's gas station in Perth. He runs an account, a tab, for all the small businesses in the area. They come in, they get their gas, they sign a little pad and they go on, and at the end of the month they come in and pay their bill. That practice would no longer be available.

1550

I'm a big supporter of the intent of this bill, but the member for Eglinton—Lawrence is asking us to criminalize an already criminal activity, something we already cover in our labour legislation, as well. He's asking us to support a bill that in all likelihood will not reduce the number of lawbreakers in this province.

Here in Toronto you may not notice it when a gas station closes—there are thousands more—but in my rural communities, your gas station may be the source for your groceries as well, the latest news, and the hub of that community. Many members undoubtedly know gas stations are closing—that's not a thing of the past. Ever-increasingly harsh environmental legislation and taxes, which only increase as the years go on, have driven many gas stations out of business throughout Ontario.

This bill, though well-intentioned, would make the jobs of gas station owners and attendants, especially those in rural areas, much more difficult. It is for these reasons that I won't be supporting Bill 12. It was a terrible tragedy that happened to Jayesh, but I don't want to see it compounded by having people losing their jobs throughout rural Ontario with this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Miss Monique Taylor: I'm happy to stand to this Bill 12 today, Jayesh's Law. I would like to start by sending my condolences to the Prajapati family. I'm very sorry for your loss. Nobody should have to die when they go to work. So I'll just leave that part at that.

Good on you, member, for bringing a bill such as this forward. I'll also speak to the portion of the previous member's speech that spoke to me, because I read in the changes of the new bill that municipalities will be able to opt out of it for reasons just as you spoke to, because they are serious concerns of our northern members, and how life is different for them. So seeing that, in this bill, is important for me to see. I thank you for those changes.

There has to be accountability on the part of the gas station owners. First of all, there cannot be the wage clawback, when they are taking money back from employees. Employees shouldn't have to be fearful that they are going to have to pay for something that is stolen from that establishment, regardless of what it could be. This happens in different sectors, across many jobs. In hospitality, if you are a waitress and you are short because somebody doesn't pay their bill, owners are

forcing these employees to pay that back. It's against the law. We need to make sure that the laws are acted upon, that the laws that are already there are being used. We need to make sure that we have good whistle-blowing laws to go along with those kinds of things so that families like this aren't found to be in such positions.

We also need to increase the minimum wage so that we don't have gas attendants making \$10 an hour. Trying to support families on \$10 an hour is an absolutely impossible task to do. Making sure that families and employees are able to make a decent living wage would not leave them in a position of feeling fearful so that they are chasing down somebody who is causing a theft—which is going to come back on them.

I can only commend Jayesh for his dedication to his job, to ensuring that everything was proper in the till at the end of the day, and that he was standing up for the community that he believes in and that he lived in—and saying that no, you can't steal; it's not right to do that. But we need to ensure that employees realize that it's not their responsibility to do that; to take a licence plate and to phone that in to a police officer to allow them to chase it down—and I'm sure, like the member said previously, the OPP and the police of this province don't want to be chasing down, to be the collection agency for the gas pumps.

I fully support this bill. I think that we definitely need to do something extra to put a little bit of an extra highlight on what's happening across the province, when people are just stealing and thinking that they're going to get away with it, because it's not right. We need to make sure that we're protecting employees—again, like I said, making sure we have whistle-blowing laws in place for them so that they're not afraid to call on their employer when they're being forced to pay for lost and missing money from their tills, however that may come about.

When this all happened, I went into the gas stations in my riding in Hamilton Mountain. I spoke with gas attendants to see how they felt about it, to see what they were thinking. I was completely shocked. I ran into two young persons who were working in a Pioneer, and I asked them what they thought about it and if their boss expected them to pay for thefts at the pumps. He said to me, "Well, it's my responsibility." I was completely shocked. I was like, "What do you mean it's your responsibility?" He said, "Well, I'm put in charge of this gas pump and I just can't let people run away with it. It's my responsibility to make sure that that gas is safe. If the owner is putting me in charge of that, I have to make sure that I'm responsible for that." I was completely blown away. I was in awe. I couldn't believe that somebody was actually brainwashed to the fact by an employer that it was this person's \$10-an-hour wage responsibility to make sure that gas was not stolen.

I did everything in my power to try to convince these young people that that's not the way it is, that there are laws in place to make sure that they're not being charged for that, but they were convinced that it was their responsibility.

I congratulate you for bringing this bill forward. I hope that we are able to do good things in this province by making a little bit of a difference to families. Again, my condolences to the family, and I'll leave the rest to my members here.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to join the debate today, and hopefully this is a private member's initiative that can do some good to make some good come from what was a very tragic event, involving the family who has joined us here today to show their support for this initiative.

I think we have to remember that the victim of this crime, that shocked us all, was a Canadian citizen, a man who had moved to this country with his family to seek a better life. He was a father, he was a husband, he was a family member who went out and tried to do the best he could to support his family. On the evening that this occurred and it all happened, he lost his life because of \$112 worth of gasoline.

I commend the member from Eglinton–Lawrence for seeing if there's something that we in this chamber can do to make this better, to at least honour the memory of Jayesh by saying this will not happen again, or will happen a lot less in the future, or that somebody else that is put in the same position as Jayesh will not have to go through what he went through: lose his life and leave a family without a husband and without a dad. It's a devastating result for \$112 worth of gasoline.

The member from Eglinton–Lawrence has shown us that there's something we can do, that there are examples around the continent of North America where changes have been made, and those changes have resulted in real results that prevent this type of occurrence. I think all you have to do, to answer the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington, is look at the example of British Columbia, is look at the city of Vancouver, where the year before they implemented the prepayment program, there were about 170 of these crimes; in 2011, there was one.

When you look at the province of Ontario, we've got somewhere between 10,000 and 20,000 occurrences a year. That means between 10,000 and 20,000 times we put somebody in the position that Jayesh Prajapati was put in that resulted in the loss of his life.

1600

We've got the ability today, as individual members, not as partisan members—I don't think any party has a position on this. This is private members' time. This is where we bring our humanity to the chamber. We have an opportunity to do something about that today if we follow the initiative that's put forward by the member from Eglinton–Lawrence.

People I know who are responsible for policing in the province of Ontario are lining up behind this bill and imploring us to do it. The chief of police in the region of Halton, Chief Steve Tanner, is also the president of the Ontario chiefs of police. He suggested that we do this. He

supports this bill fully. He knows that it's going to make a difference. He knows that it's going to prevent the loss of life. He also knows his police service members on their very, very valuable time will not have to go out and police this type of crime because a prepayment program will simply stop it from occurring.

It seems to me we can make a very special, a very easy step today by ensuring that the province of Ontario adheres to the practice in just about every other state of the union and a lot of other provinces in the country of Canada, and that is, just ask us to pay for our gas before we pump it. That's the only inconvenience to the average Canadian, the average Ontarian as a result of this. Had this been in place on the night that this crime occurred, Jayesh Prajapati would still be here today. We can do better in the future. I'd ask all members to support the initiative from the member from Eglinton–Lawrence today.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Rod Jackson: Thank you, Speaker. It is an honour to speak to this. I want to start off by giving my sincere and heartfelt condolences to the family of Jayesh on their loss. I can't even begin to imagine what it is that your family has gone through with this loss and I hope I never have to be in a position where I understand that, so my heartfelt condolences to you.

As well, to the member from Eglinton–Lawrence for putting this bill forward: I know it's very well-intended and I understand exactly what the thinking is that goes into this. However, I think there has to be an ounce of pragmatism that goes into a bill like this, too. When I take into account that charging employees for stolen gas is already illegal, I think really what we're talk about is an application of a law that's already in existence.

I go back to my municipal days, when residents would come to me and say they want the speed limit reduced on their street because people were speeding on it. It doesn't mean people are going to stop speeding because you reduce the speed limit. Just because you try to over-enforce a law that is already in existence, it doesn't mean it's going to stop it, necessarily.

Right now, gas stations are free to operate a prepaid system if they so wish. If a region finds there's a problem, if a provider of those services feel there's a problem with people gassing up and dashing away, then they can deal with it by implementing a prepaid system. Certainly, I think an awareness around what employees' rights are is something that is very warranted. Frankly, stiffer penalties for those who do gas up and dash wouldn't be out of line. That part of it I do agree with.

But the fact that there's just nothing stopping gas stations—I know in Barrie, I'm not aware—and I gas up all over that city. I'm not aware of one place that has a prepaid system in operation because there's no need for it, there's no driven need for it, like in many rural municipalities. Barrie's not so rural anymore but we just don't have this problem. It's going to cause an undue

burden on many of our small businesses that doesn't exist already, and I don't think it's going to solve a problem. The crimes that are going to be committed by these people are going to be committed anyway. I really wouldn't mind seeing stronger penalties and better awareness from employees of what their rights are. Certainly, if there is an issue with employees who do not recognize that they are not responsible when someone steals while they're on their watch—and that could go for any retail employee too. This can apply across the board. It kind of gets to, where does this ball stop rolling?

Although I really do, again, think this is a well-intended bill, I think it is a very emotional issue that needs a more pragmatic approach to solve it. I do thank the member for putting it forward. I know that private members' bills are always very interesting and well thought out. I can't support it as it stands now.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate.

Mr. Jonah Schein: I'm pleased to stand and rise to speak today on behalf of my constituents in Davenport and speak to Jayesh's Law (Worker Safety at Service Stations), a bill brought forward by the member from Eglinton-Lawrence. I also want to thank the family for coming out and to share my condolences. It's obviously just an awful thing to go through. I'm happy to support this bill. I think it should go to committee and it should be looked at carefully. I appreciate that the member has revised the bill to make it more compatible with smaller communities, which can opt out if it's appropriate there, so I think that that's a good thing there.

I think that what we really need to talk about here, and I think my colleague spoke to this a bit earlier, is about worker safety in Ontario. The United Way put out a report this week on precarious work. It said that in the GTHA, almost half of all workers experience precarious work, which means that they don't know if they are going to have work next week. It means that they don't have regular hours. It means that they work shift work. It means they don't get any benefits. It means they can't count on a pension.

Those numbers are shocking. Half of workers in this city are experiencing this kind of work, and that's absolutely unacceptable. I think we've come to accept this; we've come to say, "This is just the nature of the new global economy, that people can't expect to go to work and come back and have enough money to support their family." I think that's unacceptable. I think that we can do better, and I think that people in this chamber have a responsibility to make sure that people go to work and come home having earned a wage that will pay to support their family. I think there are things that we can do about it here.

I think this speaks to the tragedy that happened here, where people are in such precarious situations because they are so dependent on keeping that job. I think it's a disgrace that people are in that situation.

I see that in the bill, there's something here that requires gas station employers to provide work safety

training. Absolutely, I would agree, but I think we need to make sure that employers across this province are actually making sure that their employees know their rights, that we strengthen the rights of employees in this province and that we actually have the resources to inspect workplaces and make sure that workers in every workplace in this province know their rights and that bad bosses can't get away with it.

On top of that, I think we need to reduce the kind of precarious experience that people feel in their workplace, the kind of anxiety that people feel in their workplace, and make sure that they have the support: that we actually invest in our social safety system, that we take the poverty-reduction strategy that all members in this House agreed to and move it forward, that we actually move forward on some of the recommendations around the social assistance review in this province.

I think the first thing, a very easy thing, that we could do would be to bring back labour enforcement in this province and make sure that we have the resources so enforcement officers are going into workplaces. This is something that this government promised to do and has failed to actually do. I would ask them today to step up and spend the money to have labour enforcement officers in every workplace.

I'm going to leave some time to my colleague, who I know wants to speak this.

Again, my heart goes out to you folks here. Thank you for coming, and thank you to the member from Eglinton-Lawrence for bringing forward this bill. We will support it and send it to committee.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate.

Ms. Soo Wong: I am pleased to have been given the opportunity to address this very important public-safety issue. Like my colleagues before me, I want to recognize the widow and the son in this tragedy. Every Ontarian should be concerned about this kind of public safety, because we as elected members, first and foremost, are individuals and citizens of this great province, and we have a responsibility to everyday workers going to work and not able to come home. I do want to recognize that piece.

The proposed legislation, if passed, provides stability but, more importantly, addresses the issue of public safety. This government, our government, is concerned about and takes public safety, especially employee and worker safety—importantly. More importantly, there is data in British Columbia to support and demonstrate to us that we need to address this issue—but not just in British Columbia, Mr. Speaker. Other states such as South Carolina, Kentucky, Missouri, Minnesota and Texas all have this kind of "pay before you put in your gas."

Furthermore, the member from Eglinton-Lawrence, in his proposed legislation, talks about the fact that if someone is convicted of the offence, their licence will be suspended. Other states are doing that: Montana, Indiana and Missouri.

So we have examples of other jurisdictions in North America protecting their workers, protecting their community, providing a better community.

1610

The other concern of this particular legislation I'm talking about is that it is happening every day across Ontario. Just this week alone, the Toronto police are talking about trying to search for the suspect who has committed nine thefts in Scarborough and York region over gas-and-dash.

We are not just putting public safety here—we're putting limited resources from the Toronto Police Services Board to address this kind of issue. And yet we have the potential ability in this House to pass legislation to address public safety and prevention—because the focus should always be on prevention. How do we prevent this kind of criminality, and how do we collectively support our community?

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to end my remarks because I know my colleague the minister will be addressing this issue. I want to give him extra time to address this issue.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. John O'Toole: First, as is the principle here today—Mr. Colle and I have had many years here together—some would say too many. But the fact is, in sentiment, I certainly agree. There's Jayesh's Law—and I respect the family that's here and the tragedy that you suffered. I think, respectfully, the member from Eglinton—Lawrence is attempting to do the right thing.

It's a very emotional issue, and as such, we respond to these things with measures that often, perhaps—and there's probably some reason here that with the Liberals and the NDP, that it will probably carry.

In a small business sense—here's what I think, technically. I personally try to relate these things to my community. What's missing in the gas station set-up is they're all self-serve now. I think of seniors and persons with special needs who have trouble filling their car up, because no one serves gas anymore.

By the same token, I have been in situations where I've had to pay in advance, and I'm at the pump, trying to put the gas in, not knowing that I have to pay in advance. You go into this little cubicle, and you feel like, "I could get held up." It's almost like, "Excuse me, sir. Can I have \$20 worth of gas?" or something. So it isn't working very well for the customers or, as you've described, for the employees, who are exposed to vulnerability.

You can't be all things to all people here, so I'm sort of not supporting this bill, because I think it's more of an emotional bent. I understand, in your remarks, when you spoke on the introduction of the bill on the 26th—just recently—that there are 10,000 gas thefts a year, and your intent here is to look at people on minimum wage, mostly.

But I think it's a useful discussion, and the useful discussion is this: The large companies, whether it's Husky, Shell, Esso, or even Beaver—the independents—

should be listening, because I think having employees who feel safe and work safe—they're not going to be ripping you off in some other way of saying, "Somebody short-changed me," or "I have a bad cheque" or trading money or whatever they do—perhaps counterfeit etc.

But I think the large companies should be listening and do the right thing for the employees on their own. Business shouldn't be micromanaged and told what to do. It's assuming that they're all bad behaviours.

This event in itself is a tragedy. I think there was an inquest, and I think that inquests should be paid attention to. As I've said before, persons in these situations are often working at night or in vulnerable situations. They may have a modest income and really need the job and the income.

I think it's unconscionable that an employer of any standing would deduct the loss at the till for someone who did the deed of gas-and-dash, I guess they call it. But I still try to think of, in my riding of Durham, which is Uxbridge, which is a fairly modest community—Scugog and the Port Perry area and sort of Clarington is, I think, a more friendly area. I don't hear much of this; I might hear a bit of it in Pickering as you get closer to Toronto. Other than that, I haven't really heard of any events. I did call two or three people that I know who operate two or three gas stations and they say, "We're at risk anyway," because at night, you are depending on people's honesty to come and pay after you've got the gas.

I think one of the suggestions that I think is worthy of consideration is having an appropriate camera system—video recording. I don't encourage people to put themselves at risk to intervene in these situations at all. Even if it's a bank robber, the banks tell them, "Hand the money over, and we'll deal with it later."

In the same case here, I think that's another message. This debate today does serve a purpose. It tells the large companies these are risks; it tells them it's completely unreasonable to take it from their pay; and the third thing is they shouldn't try to intervene. The police themselves would tell you that: If you're intervening, you're putting yourself at risk unnecessarily.

As such, it's in that sentiment that the debate has been worthwhile. It makes a contribution to making our communities safer. It educates the public in terms of these events.

I put to you that I've travelled in the States, and I found it rather intimidating to, at night, get out of the car at the side of some highway and find out that you have to go in and pay for the gas and maybe not have—they want your credit card and they're locked up. I'm wondering if I get the credit card back.

Again, I know I'm pretty well filling time here, and I'm quite aware of that. There is a certain amount of time for debate, and I've had the pleasure and the privilege of preparing for that.

I commend the member from Eglinton—Lawrence and wish him luck in the outcome of this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Paul Miller: First of all, I'd like to extend my condolences to the family. It's a tragedy, and we certainly are all upset about it.

I also would like to commend Mr. Colle from Eglinton–Lawrence for his effort. It's a good bill, and I think more and more around this Legislature, when good things come forward—doesn't matter from whom or what party—that people should vote on that basis, not on partisan politics.

Over the years, I've seen many, many of these incidents happen at gas stations and variety stores. We just recently had a death in Hamilton at a store where someone went in and robbed the clerk and pushed her downstairs and killed her. Luckily, there was a surveillance camera, and they got him.

But these things have got to stop. These people are just doing their job. They're honourable people. They want to do the right thing. They want to do right by their employer. They want to do right by their family. They're just working, and when things like this happen, it's wrong.

There are a couple of little things that have to be changed in the bill, but that can be done at committee. At this point, I think it's a good effort, and I certainly, in my personal position, will be supporting it. Our party will be supporting it to pass second reading. We think this is long overdue, and I really appreciate the member bringing this forward because I think it's a worthy, worthy cause, and we maybe can save some lives down the road.

I would like to also see continued improvement in surveillance equipment at facilities, not just cameras. I want to catch licence plates. I want to catch a better view of the suspect. I want better cameras, more expensive ones, so you can get details so when they cover up and try to hide, we can catch them.

Once again, thank you, Mr. Colle, for bringing this forward. You'll be getting the support, at this point, from the NDP.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate? The Minister of Labour.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak on this bill. As the Minister of Labour, I felt it's really important that I speak about this bill and pass my personal condolences on to Mr. Prajapati's family. From the bottom of my heart, from our government, please accept our condolences on your tragic loss. It's not just a loss to your family; it's a loss to all of us.

This is an important issue, not only in light of this tragedy, but in all respects. Of course, we cannot afford to lose any other lives. I do want to thank the MPP from Eglinton–Lawrence for bringing this issue forward and giving it the profile necessary.

1620

I wanted to take a little bit of time to just talk about what's already in place in terms of laws within the

Ministry of Labour. We already have laws in place that cover situations such as gas-and-dash in the Employment Standards Act and the Occupational Health and Safety Act. These laws, if obeyed, can help prevent situations such as these.

To be absolutely clear, the Employment Standards Act clearly states that an employer cannot deduct wages from an employee working at a gas station because someone leaves without paying. There are no exceptions whatsoever to these laws. If an employee feels the employer has made deductions that contravene the Employment Standards Act, they should call our employment standards information centre at 1-800-531-5551 and file a claim with the ministry, and it will be fully investigated.

On the other hand, the Occupational Health and Safety Act requires employers to have workplace violence and harassment policies in place, and programs to implement those policies. Employers are also required to assess the risks of workplace violence and to have measures and procedures in place to control those risks. All these measures are there to ensure that our workplaces, like gas stations—the kind Mr. Prajapati worked at—are safe places.

Due to Mr. Colle's advocacy on this issue, the Ministry of Labour has taken very swift action to ensure that our gas stations are safe. In the case of the gas station where Mr. Prajapati worked, the ministry conducted two investigations into five gas stations that were owned by this entity. In addition, we put together a targeted action plan that includes a blitz of employment standards inspections of gas stations across the province. While the blitz is still under way, from April 1, 2012, to February 21, 2013, the ministry has completed 284 employment standards inspections across the province and determined that there were \$240,000 in wages owing to 2,120 vulnerable employees. During that same period, the ministry's Employment Standards Program only found six violations of deductions from wages.

In addition to the blitz, the Ministry of Labour is undertaking other actions, including distributing health and safety materials to employers during inspections, launching a dedicated Web page on deductions from wages, reaching out to all gas station owners and franchisees through their umbrella organizations, and providing materials in multiple languages for both employers and workers to ensure they understand their rights and responsibilities.

Speaker, this is an important issue. I think the member from Eglinton–Lawrence has raised some unique issues that we need to address. We need to make sure that the health and safety of workers working in gas stations across the province, be it large cities or small towns, are protected and that those workers are working in safe environments. That is why I'm encouraging all members in this House to vote in favour of this bill so we can take it to the committee and study this in a little bit more detail so that we can see how we can implement measures that will protect the health and safety of workers.

I am very much interested and I am already working with Mr. Colle to find ways to ensure that all gas stations are safe places to work and that we ensure that workers, especially the vulnerable workers working at these gas stations, are not working in precarious employment situations, that they actually are safe and earning income in a legal fashion that is in compliance with both the Employment Standards Act and Occupational Health and Safety Act.

Thank you to Mr. Prajapati's family and Mr. Colle for raising this issue.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

The member for Eglinton-Lawrence, you have two minutes to reply.

Mr. Mike Colle: Thank you. I wanted to again thank Vaishali Prajapati and Rishabh, her 12-year-old son, for showing the courage to fight against this injustice. This is not easy.

In this case here, you're also taking on some of the world's largest multinationals. It's not about small business, folks. They don't like this change. We need to change this thing to protect vulnerable people. In the United States, it's almost in every state—same oil companies. We have to do something that protects people who are intimidated and marginalized. The member from Hamilton Mountain said it best: She walked into the station—

Interjections.

Mr. Mike Colle: I know the members from the Tory party don't care.

She walked into the station, and you know what the young person told you: that she was afraid, basically did not understand that it wasn't her job to chase down the gas-and-dash thief. That's what it is—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order, please.

Mr. Mike Colle: There's wholesale intimidation of these marginal workers who are working for \$10—they're afraid if they go to the Labour Relations Board, they're going to lose their job; they're not going to get the hours. They've just come to this country or they don't know English or they're young students. They're afraid to go to the Labour Relations Board.

Sure, there are laws in place—folks, they're not working. There are 10,000 reported cases a year under your noses; another 10,000 aren't reported, breaking the law. Your police chiefs are saying that you've got to make this thing stop. The police chiefs—Chief Blair; Chief Jolliffe, York region—are saying that this is a farce that we can't protect ordinary workers at gas stations at night or when they're doing their job. It's not working.

Let's make the laws tougher, enforce them and put these criminals behind bars. It's as simple as that, folks. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

COMPREHENSIVE PUBLIC SECTOR
COMPENSATION FREEZE ACT, 2013
LOI DE 2013 SUR LE GEL GLOBAL
DE LA RÉMUNÉRATION
DANS LE SECTEUR PUBLIC

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): We will deal first with ballot item number 1, standing in the name of Mr. Shurman.

Mr. Shurman has moved second reading of Bill 5. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a bunch of noes.

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

We will take the vote on this motion at the end of our business.

LIQUOR LICENCE
AMENDMENT ACT (SERVING LIQUOR
IN CERTAIN PLACES), 2013
LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT
LA LOI SUR LES PERMIS D'ALCOOL
(SERVICE D'ALCOOL
DANS CERTAINS LIEUX)

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mrs. Albanese has moved second reading of Bill 8. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mrs. Albanese, referral?

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I would ask that the bill be referred to the committee on regulations and private bills.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Agreed? Agreed.

JAYESH'S LAW (WORKER SAFETY
AT SERVICE STATIONS), 2013

LOI JAYESH DE 2013
SUR LA SÉCURITÉ DES TRAVAILLEURS
DANS LES STATIONS-SERVICE

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. Colle has moved second reading of Bill 12. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member from Eglinton-Lawrence.

Mr. Mike Colle: I move that the bill be moved to the committee on general government.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Agreed? Agreed.

**COMPREHENSIVE PUBLIC SECTOR
COMPENSATION FREEZE ACT, 2013**

**LOI DE 2013 SUR LE GEL GLOBAL
DE LA RÉMUNÉRATION
DANS LE SECTEUR PUBLIC**

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1628 to 1633.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Can I have all members take their seats, please.

Mr. Shurman has moved Bill 5. All those in favour, please rise and remain standing.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted
Bailey, Robert
Barrett, Toby
Chudleigh, Ted
Clark, Steve
Dunlop, Garfield
Elliott, Christine
Fedeli, Victor
Hardeman, Ernie
Harris, Michael
Hillier, Randy
Hudak, Tim

Jackson, Rod
Jones, Sylvia
Klees, Frank
Leone, Rob
MacLaren, Jack
MacLeod, Lisa
McDonell, Jim
McKenna, Jane
McNaughton, Monte
Miller, Norm
Milligan, Rob E.
Munro, Julia

Nicholls, Rick
O'Toole, John
Ouellette, Jerry J.
Pettapiece, Randy
Scott, Laurie
Shurman, Peter
Smith, Todd
Thompson, Lisa M.
Walker, Bill
Wilson, Jim
Yakabuski, John
Yurek, Jeff

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): All those opposed, please rise and remain standing.

Nays

Albanese, Laura
Berardinetti, Lorenzo
Bisson, Gilles
Cansfield, Donna H.
Chan, Michael
Chiarelli, Bob
Colle, Mike
Damerla, Dipika
Delaney, Bob
Dickson, Joe
DiNovo, Cheri
Duguid, Brad

Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Forster, Cindy
Gélinas, France
Hoskins, Eric
Jaczek, Helena
Kwinter, Monte
Mantha, Michael
Marchese, Rosario
McNeely, Phil
Miller, Paul
Milloy, John
Moridi, Reza

Murray, Glen R.
Naqvi, Yasir
Piruzza, Teresa
Prue, Michael
Qaadir, Shafiq
Schein, Jonah
Singh, Jagmeet
Taylor, Monique
Vanthof, John
Wong, Soo
Zimmer, David

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 36; the nays are 35.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

Mr. Peter Shurman: To the committee on the Legislative Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Agreed? Agreed.

Orders of the day?

Hon. John Milloy: I move adjournment of the House.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Is it the pleasure of the House that the House be adjourned? Agreed? Agreed.

This House stands adjourned until March 4 at 10:30 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1639.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneur: Hon. / L'hon. David C. Onley, O.Ont.

Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Dave Levac

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Tonia Grannum, Trevor Day, Anne Stokes

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP)	London–Fanshawe	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Scarborough–Rouge River	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Bartolucci, Rick (LIB)	Sudbury	
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough–Sud-Ouest	
Best, Margaret R. (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	House Leader, Recognized Party / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Minister of the Environment / Ministre de l'Environnement Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Broten, Hon. / L'hon. Laurel C. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Campbell, Sarah (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	
Cansfield, Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport Minister Responsible for the 2015 Pan and Parapan American Games / Ministre responsable des Jeux panaméricains et parapanaméricains de 2015
Chiarelli, Hon. / L'hon. Bob (LIB)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Halton	
Clark, Steve (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Coteau, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Crack, Grant (LIB)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Craitor, Kim (LIB)	Niagara Falls	
Damerla, Dipika (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	
Del Duca, Steven (LIB)	Vaughan	
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	
Fedeli, Victor (PC)	Nipissing	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Kitchener–Waterloo	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (LIB) Forster, Cindy (NDP)	Oakville Welland	Deputy House Leader, Recognized Party / Leader parlementaire adjointe de parti reconnu
Gélinas, France (NDP) Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Nickel Belt Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les îles	Attorney General / Procureur général
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay-Superior North / Thunder Bay-Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Hardeman, Ernie (PC) Harris, Michael (PC) Hillier, Randy (PC)	Oxford Kitchener-Conestoga Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hoskins, Hon. / L'hon. Eric (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment / Ministre du Développement économique, du Commerce et de l'Emploi
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West-Glanbrook / Niagara-Ouest-Glanbrook	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
Jackson, Rod (PC) Jaczek, Helena (LIB) Jeffrey, Hon. / L'hon. Linda (LIB)	Barrie Oak Ridges-Markham Brampton-Springdale	Chair of Cabinet / Présidente du Conseil des ministres Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
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No. 8

Nº 8

ISSN 1180-2987

Legislative Assembly
of Ontario

Second Session, 40th Parliament

Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario

Deuxième session, 40^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**



**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Monday 4 March 2013

Lundi 4 mars 2013

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

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Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



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Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 4 March 2013

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 4 mars 2013

The House met at 1030.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I'd like to introduce, in the east members' gallery, the family of my page, Rhea Basu: father Anin, mother Sonia and sister Ayesha. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I'd like to introduce, in the gallery, my executive assistant from North Bay, Mr. Craig Dellandrea.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'd like to introduce, in the members' west gallery—actually the public galleries out to the west—Mark McKinnon from the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: We have a page from my riding, Jaden Dilda, and joining us today, as I understand, are his mother, Kelly; his father, Richard; two sets of grandparents—grandmother Lena, grandfather George, grandmother Dianne Hersey and grandfather Doug Hersey—and aunt Rochelle Barber. I would like to welcome them to the House.

Mr. Kim Craitor: I'm really pleased to introduce the parents and sisters of Lauren George, who is a page here from Niagara Falls from Prince Philip school. I know they're not in the members' gallery, but I know they're here because I had my photo taken with them. I'm going to introduce them. They are: Jennifer George, the mother; the father is E.J. George; and sisters Erica George and Vanessa George—a wonderful family from my riding of Niagara Falls.

Mr. Joe Dickson: I'd like to welcome to the Legislature today Ajax page Jessica Kostuch's mother, Wendy Kostuch, and close family friend Wendy Kelly. They are sitting in the gallery this morning. I'm sure that Jessica is honoured to have you both here this morning to show your support. I welcome you to Queen's Park.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I want to join my colleague from Niagara Falls in welcoming long-time friends, actually, who had lived in Fort Erie—E.J. and Jennifer George and their daughters Erica and Vanessa—here today because Lauren George is a page captain. I go a long time back with—well, Jennifer is obviously younger, so not that long ago, but her husband, E.J., who joins us—we went to elementary school, high school and then Western King's together. We spent some time carousing, if that's parliamentary, Speaker. But I do want to say, if he says

anything about my past, Speaker, don't believe a single word of it.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm set up with so many lines, I'm just going to pass.

Mr. Mike Colle: I'd like to welcome the staff and students of Marshall McLuhan high school in my riding on Avenue Road, named after the great Canadian Marshall McLuhan, who is probably the father of modern media and modern communication. Marshall McLuhan high school—thank you.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question is to the Premier. Premier, two weeks ago I asked you this question; I'm going to give you another chance to answer it. Can you name for us one Dalton McGuinty program that you're going to reverse or postpone to balance the budget?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'm assuming this is a question about fiscal responsibility. I have said very clearly in this House that we are on track to balance the budget. We have a plan to, by 2017-18, reduce the deficit, to eliminate the deficit. As I say, we are overachieving on those targets. We have put wage constraint in place, there have been reductions across government and we are constraining growth, which is exactly what the Drummond report asked us to do. Restraining growth is what needed to happen. Wage constraint is what we've put in place, and that is why we're on track to reduce the deficit by 2017-18.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Well, 600,000 unemployed and the biggest deficit in Canada is not my definition of overachieving.

Premier, as you know, a monumental bill passed on Thursday evening—Bill 5, standing in the name of my colleague from Thornhill, to freeze wages. I want to ask you, Premier: Given that that bill has passed second reading—it's something we believe in in order to get the deficit under control, balance the books and to make pay just as the 85% of people who are not on the government payroll who had their wages frozen.

Premier, please assure me that you actually are going to continue a wage freeze policy for our public service, or at least support the outstanding bill by Mr. Shurman.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I've been clear; our objectives are the same. We know that we need to continue to

constrain those costs. In fact, we have said—and I have said here today—that we are on track to eliminate the deficit by 2017-18. We are restricting overall spending increases.

We're looking, though, beyond those measures to support small business, to make sure that they have the capacity to continue to grow the economy and to increase jobs. We're going to continue to work to ensure that small businesses have access to capital. We've got a plan to continue to constrain those costs, to continue to constrain growth and spending, and to help the economy to grow and put those conditions in place.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I think, respectfully, Premier, we do not share the same objectives. We want to reduce spending; you want to increase it. We want to fire up our economy and create jobs; you want to stall it. We want to restore the balance between union bosses and the hard-working taxpayers who pay the bills; you want to give more and more power to Pat Dillon and the Working Families Coalition.

1040

Before the House was prorogued—September 26, 2012, to be exact—the previous finance minister, Dwight Duncan, announced a number of initiatives in the Protecting Public Services Act that included a wage freeze, a wage freeze for non-union workers, and an elimination of the booking of sick days in the province of Ontario to help balance the budget. Which of those—the wage freeze, the wage freeze for non-union personnel, and the elimination of booked sick days—do you support in an initiative to balance our budget in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Every effort is being taken to reduce our spending curve; right? We have to take every effort to try to make us more competitive. We recognize that in order for us to balance our budget by 2017, we've got to take these steps, and we've taken some very concerted steps. But it's interesting to note that what we want are results. We talk about the wage freeze. In effect, that's what we've been doing. Even arbitrated deals have been coming in at zero-zero, and we will continue to do just that.

What we do not want to do is put at risk the very issues that we're trying to achieve, which is maintaining stability in the system, reducing our wages so that we can be competitive and balance our books.

But it's interesting to note that the Leader of the Opposition himself also has some issues with deficits. He himself is running the highest deficit of any party, and his own party voted last week to limit his runaway spending. Speaker, how is it that we can trust that initiative? We're taking the steps necessary, and we will continue to do so.

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. Peter Shurman: My question is also to the Premier. On Thursday afternoon, when you and your cabinet

were away pretending to care about Ontario's north, you embarrassingly lost a vote on my wage freeze legislation. Either you have an incompetent whip or that caucus is sadly divided.

Anyway, this is legislation that you and your union friends have opposed for months, indeed, not to say years. We are sure that your friends at the Working Families Coalition were none too impressed. After a long, dark decade of putting union bosses ahead of the interests of Ontario taxpayers, can you tell us today just what Patrick Dillon was doing in your office on Wednesday, February 27?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let me just say, Mr. Speaker, that I am very proud of the fact that I talk to a range of people. My caucus talks to a range of people. And, to that point, our cabinet was in Sault Ste. Marie on Friday, meeting with hundreds of people from the community: members of the chamber of commerce, people who were talking to us about youth employment and the ways to support businesses in the north. I think that is a very important aspect of the work of government.

It is really disappointing that the member opposite doesn't think that government connecting with people on the ground, hearing their ideas and incorporating their ideas into policy, is the way that government should work. We believe it is, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Shurman: Well, I'm sorry, Speaker; that's not good enough, Premier. With kids locked out of extracurricular activities, public sector wages 15% to 30% above equivalent jobs in the private sector and Ontario hurtling towards a \$30-billion deficit, Ontarians deserve to know just what Pat Dillon was asking of you and of Ontario taxpayers. Did Patrick Dillon meet with you? What did he demand? If not, who in your office, Premier, did meet with him and just what did you and your office promise him?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, as I said, there are hundreds of meetings that happen very day between members of this government and people in various communities. What's really important to me is that we understand that some of the allegations in that little rant that the member opposite just did are just not true.

So, in terms of our trajectory and the deficit reduction, we are overachieving on those targets. We are on track to eliminate the deficit by 2017-18. We've been very clear that constraining public sector wages is part of what we are doing and will continue to do. That's why we're on target. The Drummond report said that if we didn't take those measures, if we didn't work to constrain costs, then we would not be able to balance the budget. But we are, and we're on target to eliminate the deficit by 2017-18.

Interjection.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Yes, we are.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Premier, you know full well that Pat Dillon controls a syndicate of unions with a front called the Working Families Coalition. That syndicate

secretly spends millions of dollars to make sure the Ontario Liberal Party just keeps getting elected so that you will keep paying more and more and more. Union bosses across Ontario like the power that the McGuinty-Wynne Liberals have given them, and we find it passing strange that one of the first meetings you hold in your office is with Patrick Dillon, no less.

Premier, just how much did you and/or your staff sell Ontario out for this time?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I have two comments to make. The first one is the one I keep repeating, and that is, when somebody is asking a question and someone from the same side starts to interject while they're asking the question, it's very difficult to respond to somebody who's making noise on the other side. And when somebody is giving an answer and someone is interjecting, it's hard for me to respond to somebody making noise on the other side. I'm going to ask you to control that. At least let the question be put and at least let the answer be put.

The second thing: We're getting dangerously close to making an allegation, and I'm going to allow it, except to warn you: If it comes closer, I will call you to order.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Actually, one of the first meetings I took—I don't know where the member opposite got the idea that this was one of the first meetings one of my staff members took—was with the Leader of the Opposition. That's one of the very first meetings I took.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, I meet with dozens of people in a week. We meet with hundreds of people over the period of a week. I'm quite sure a member of my staff met with Pat Dillon. As you know, he's a member of the College of Trades Appointments Council.

The point is that we, on this side of the House, really believe it's very important that we meet with people from all walks of life with experience from all backgrounds so that we can understand what is happening. That's why we travelled to Sault Ste. Marie, it's why we met with the chamber of commerce in Sault Ste. Marie, it's why my cabinet ministers met with their stakeholders in schools, colleges and universities: to make sure we understand the issues on the ground so that that can inform our policy development.

HOME CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier, and it's a pretty simple one. Will the Premier commit to a five-day home care guarantee for families who are stuck waiting in some communities for as long as 262 days on a wait-list, so they can get some care for loved ones they have who are needing it?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As the leader of the third party knows, this is an issue that is of great concern to us. It's something we acknowledged in the throne speech that needs to be addressed, Mr. Speaker. We have done an enormous amount—I know the Minister of Health will want to speak to this issue—to transform the health care

system to make sure that people are getting the health care they need in the right place and in a timely way.

But we also know there is more to do, and we know there are investments in home care and changes within the system that need to be made. I'm looking forward to working with both parties on this, because I think it's an issue that really transcends party lines. All of us know there are people in our constituencies who need care. We need to make sure they get it—at home if that's where it is best for them.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, home care lets Ontarians live with comfort, live with independence, live with dignity. But there are more than 6,100 people currently waiting to get home care in this province. When it comes to health care dollars, this government prefers to invest in sky-high CEO salaries which, despite promises, have still not been capped.

Will the Premier agree that there's something unfair about asking seniors to wait for home care if we're not asking CEOs to wait for their salary increases?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Improving access to home care is an area where we have such clear common ground with the third party. We are absolutely committed to providing more people with access to more care. We demonstrated that in our last budget. We committed to more money in the home care sector, and we are seeing the benefits of that now. People are waiting a little bit less for home care now. As we move forward, Speaker, as we continue with the transformation of our health care system, we will see more care in the home and more care in the community. In order to achieve that, we do have to make some difficult decisions in other parts of our health care system, but that is exactly the right choice to make.

1050

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The government says we have to choose between home care and hospitals. But the people remember this very government's promise not to make health care cuts.

Will the Premier tell Ontarians why she thinks seniors should be waiting for home care and services should be cut in hospitals while salaries for those at the very top can continue to rise? New Democrats don't think that's the priority.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I think it's really important that we acknowledge that there is, in fact, no wait time for home care for people who are being discharged from hospitals with an urgent need for that home care—there is no wait time for that.

Speaker, we are increasing funding in our health care sector. As a government, we've put a priority on health care. We are not cutting health care spending; I can't be any more clear than that. We are, however, shifting spending. That is part of the transformation of our health care system that needs to take place and that has the

support of a broad cross-section of people in the health care sector, including people who advocate for more home care.

Speaker, we're on the right path. We're moving forward. More people will need home care. More people will get home care. We want people to get the care they need in an acute care hospital if that's what they need, but if they're ready to go home, let's be there with the right supports for them.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is to the Premier. Susan from Oshawa wrote to us out of frustration because of the lack of balance in the way the Liberal government has funded health care in this province: "These upper level costs"—meaning executive salaries—"need to be radically contained and service at the front line needs [to be] beefed [up]."

Will the Premier agree that we need a balanced approach that caps hospital CEO salaries and finds efficiencies in LHINs and CCACs so that we can strengthen home care and health care in this province?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think that the approach to all of these policy areas has to be balanced. We have to make sure that we have the best people in those positions of responsibility, but we also have to make sure that the money that we invest in the system provides the service that people need. That's exactly what we've been doing. We've been looking at the increasing costs in health care and, as the Minister of Health has said, health care costs are not going down; they're going up. But what we have to be clear about is that people get the service that they need, and whether they need it in a hospital or from a community service or at home, making sure that that delivery mechanism is exactly what it should be.

I agree that there has to be balance in terms of the administrative costs, and the sharing of best practices among CCACs, among local health integration networks, is a very important part of that transformation.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Linda from Hamilton, my hometown, noted that the CEO of Hamilton Health Sciences sees his salary go up every year. It's now over \$700,000 a year, plus a car allowance, but as Linda notes, "They close beds in the interest of saving money."

Will the Premier tell Ontarians why her government is making cuts in hospitals while CEOs in the hospitals continue to have their salaries rise year over year?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I think the member opposite and others will be interested in a couple of quotes so they know that I'm not the only one supporting our action plan.

Here's a quote: "We're very pleased to see that the [health] minister's action plan that she announced in January has been carried into the budget. We think that this focused approach to investing in community care is

the right initiative to relieving the alternative level of care pressure in Ontario."

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Who said that?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Steve Harvey from the Alzheimer Society of Ontario.

Speaker, "A local physician"—in Belleville—"has come to the defence of a Quinte Health Care's proposed 'community care' strategy—a plan he deems the cheapest and best overall option for improved patient care.

"Care delivered in the community is more effective at prevention and treating chronic diseases," said Jonathan Kerr, primary care lead for South East Local Health Integration Network."

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier and the government have talked a lot about change. A five-day home care guarantee is a positive change that we can afford in this province. Ontarians are frustrated that the government would rather cut beds or let over 6,000 families wait for home care than take a balanced approach to delivering health care.

Does the Premier agree that it's time for real change and a balanced approach so that we can make sure that Ontarians have access to the health care that they need?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: We could not agree more with the leader of the third party that we need to continue to invest more in home care. That is our highest priority right now and it is backed up by real dollars. We are talking about 90,000 more seniors getting access to the care that they need.

Let me just read another quote: "I'm very happy with the budget as a home care provider. This is an opportunity to serve more Ontarians. This is certainly what we've been looking for and I think it's really important; home care is where people want to be, people want to be at home." That's from Susan VanderBent, the executive director of the Ontario Home Care Association.

There is overwhelming support for the transformation of our health care system. As we care for more people in the home, we are going to be able to free up those hospital beds for people who need acute care in the hospital.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Good morning, Speaker. My question is for the Premier.

We're seeing a frightening pattern emerge over this gas plant scandal: We hear the Premier say one thing but actually do the opposite. She promised a select committee to "get to the bottom" of the gas plant scandal, but after that media event she took the offer off the table. Last Thursday, she held another media event and pledged to reveal "party documents," but at that very same moment her MPPs were filing the actual motion at committee, which did not include the words "party documents." Again, we're hearing one thing, but the opposite happens.

Premier, when are you going to come clean about your role in the gas plant scandal?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Well, I really hope that the opposition members are going to support the expansion of the mandate of the justice committee so that that committee can ask for all the documentation that, apparently, the members opposite have wanted to have access to. It is a very straightforward initiative that we have put forward. We want the opposition—we want the committee—to be able to ask for the full range of documentation, including if they want to ask for documents from the Liberal Party or from the Conservative Party or from the NDP. They can ask for that documentation, but not unless they support the motion to expand the committee mandate.

So I would ask the member opposite, is his party going to support the motion to expand the mandate of the committee?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Premier, while you were in the media conference telling reporters one thing, your MPPs were in the justice committee saying something completely different. In fact, both your news conference and the committee motion were nothing more than charades. We don't need your party's fourth promise to provide documents; all that did was acknowledge that there indeed are more documents that you are holding. Your own House leader told the contempt committee it "can request whatever documents it wants from the Liberal Party or the government."

Premier, we don't need your permission; we need your compliance. Will you turn over the Liberal Party documents today?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, it's time to review—*Interjections*.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Lanark, come to order, please. The member for Leeds-Grenville, come to order.

House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Let's review the Conservatives' record on this. First they opposed the gas plants during the election. "Done, done, done," we're told by the Leader of the Opposition. Then they come out and say that a judicial inquiry is too expensive—except for the member from Nipissing, who holds press conference to say he wants a judicial inquiry. They reject our offer of an all-party committee, instead to go after a private citizen—a former member of the Legislature. Then they announce they're going to vote against a budget that hasn't even been written yet. Finally, on Thursday, when the Premier makes an offer to broaden the justice committee so that it can look into all aspects of the gas plant situation, they say, "We'll get back to you. We need the weekend to think about it."

When are they going to give us an answer as to whether they're going to support the broadening of the—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

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AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la première ministre.

Ontario's Ombudsman has warned that without his oversight, Ornge will continue to have no credible accountability. The Premier likes to use the right words—she talks about accountability; she talks about transparency—yet she denies this small, cost-free measure. Her reassurances right now look more like empty promises.

Can the Premier give me a valid reason as to why she is blocking Ombudsman oversight? I'm a reasonable person. Explain to me why you are saying no to Ombudsman oversight of Ornge.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health reintroduced legislation that would put in place a much stricter regime of monitoring over the air ambulance organization. In fact, it incorporates items that the member brought forward, to make sure that there was the kind of constraint in place that needed to be there.

I'm hoping that the third party will support us in getting that legislation to committee so it can be discussed, because we want that oversight in place. We recognize that there needed to be a better regime of monitoring in place. That's why we introduced the legislation, and that's why we listened to the opposition when they brought forward their components, and we incorporated those into the legislation.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I don't understand. How can you say you want oversight, but yet say you don't want the Ombudsman? Something is not adding up. The promise of a new era at Ornge has to be followed up by concrete action, yet today we seem to be playing games again. Ontarians deserve oversight. They deserve accountability. They deserve to know that Ornge is on the right path.

Why won't you do the right thing? Why won't you restore public confidence in the troubled air ambulance service and give the Ombudsman oversight of Ornge? It looks like you're afraid that he's going to find something else at Ornge if you let him in there.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm very pleased that very early in this new Legislature, we reintroduced Bill 11, that enhances oversight at Ornge. I think all of us know that this is legislation that needs to be passed.

I am grateful that my critic, the member of the third party, is supporting the transformation at Ornge. I would very much like to hear more from her about this idea. We did listen last time when she advocated that we bring Ornge in under freedom of information, and we are committed to doing that, Speaker.

Let's get this bill passed. Let's get it into committee. Let's have that conversation where it belongs: in committee.

CHILD POVERTY

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. I'm pleased with our government's commitment to reduce poverty in Ontario and the progress we've made together, but we must continue to do more, especially during tough economic times. We must ensure that the most vulnerable, like low-income families and children, are protected and supported.

I understand that a report was released last week which looked at poverty in the province, with a specific focus on children and youth. Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister: What is our government doing to ensure that we protect our most vulnerable in our community?

Hon. Teresa Piruzza: I'd like to thank the member from Scarborough-Rouge River for his question and for his concern with respect to poverty reduction and for the children of our province.

Yes, Campaign 2000 did release their report last week, and I'd like to thank Campaign 2000 for their report as well as acknowledging our Poverty Reduction Strategy and the steps that we have taken over the years. It's the first type of strategy of its kind in the province.

Mr. Speaker, our government has made significant progress in the fight against poverty through our government's Poverty Reduction Strategy. We have introduced the Ontario Child Benefit, as we know. Through many of our programs, we have been able to lift over 40,000 children out of poverty. That was in the midst of a global economic uncertainty and challenge in our province.

Speaker, we certainly acknowledge that there's more work to do, and we look forward to working with all our partners to continue our progress.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I would like to thank the minister for that response. I'm pleased that we remain committed to reducing poverty. I'm glad that our government is committed to the Poverty Reduction Strategy, and we have seen some important results from it. There's a lot to be done when it comes to poverty and giving children and youth the best opportunity to reach their full potential.

My question: What are some of the initiatives of the Poverty Reduction Strategy, and how do they assist Ontario children and youth?

Hon. Teresa Piruzza: Again, thank you for the follow-up question. Our most recent 2012 report, which was released in the fall, contains many encouraging signs of progress—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek, please come to order.

Hon. Teresa Piruzza: —in services that we have provided.

Over 950,000 children in 510,000 families are being helped by the OCB, or the Ontario Child Benefit. Almost 122,000 kids are getting a stronger start in about 1,700 schools through full-day kindergarten. Nearly 33,000

children and young people, who may have otherwise gone untreated, are receiving free dental care through Healthy Smiles Ontario.

Speaker, as I indicated earlier, we know that there's more work to do in the fight against poverty, and together with our partners, we'll continue to find lasting solutions to break the cycle of poverty.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Todd Smith: My question this morning is to the Premier. Premier, last week you admitted that the decision to cancel the gas plants in Mississauga and Oakville was a political decision, but you've yet to say whose political decision it was.

An article from September 2011 highlights you, the finance minister, the Deputy Premier, the labour minister and the Minister of Natural Resources as senior players in the last Liberal election campaign. Most of your senior cabinet members could be under the spotlight in this Liberal scandal. Did one of them actually make the call to cancel the power plants or was it, as we've suspected all along, unelected Liberal Party officials who were desperate to save a couple of Liberal seats in the GTA?

Premier, will you stand in this House today and tell us whose idea it was to cancel those power plants?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: The question of—
Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Lanark will withdraw, and there's a reason for that. I think he understands why.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, the question of the documents that were produced related to the gas plants is before a committee of this Legislature, and hopefully—and I look forward to the member answering in his supplementary—with the support of the Progressive Conservative Party, we're going to broaden that committee's mandate so they can look into all aspects of it. I know one of the things they will want to look at is the role of the Leader of the Opposition in terms of his call for the cancellation of it.

Mr. Speaker, last week I had a chance to talk about Twitter. I had a chance to talk about YouTube. In the supplementary, I look forward to telling everyone about an appearance the Leader of the Opposition had on that fine show, *The Agenda*.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Todd Smith: Speaker, there have been strings attached all the way along. We wanted these documents back in May of last year. This Premier has had almost five months since this scandal ended up on the floor of the House to ask who is responsible for this campaign decision. Are you asking us to believe that you have not asked even one of your cabinet ministers or senior Liberal Party officials about it in that time? If you have

asked those questions and you still don't have the answers, then it's clear that the vote you lost last Thursday afternoon here in this House isn't the first sign of a lack of confidence your caucus has shown for you.

Premier, you've had five months to find out who is responsible for making that decision. If you still don't know who made the decision, what makes you think that you're responsible enough to sit in that chair?

Hon. John Milloy: I listened intently to the honourable member's question and nowhere in there did I find out if their party will be supporting the broadening of the committee's mandate. Mr. Speaker, no strings attached on this side. I will stand in this House at the end of question period, if he likes, and we can pass that unanimous consent motion.

But, Mr. Speaker, I promised: The Agenda, Leader of the Opposition—

Interjections.

Hon. John Milloy: Please—February 28, 2013, the host, Steve Paikin, about the Mississauga gas plant: "...but you would have cancelled it as well." The Leader of the Opposition: "Well, let's be clear.... I never would have built those plants. I objected to that from the beginning. With respect to Mississauga, I mean, you're right.... I said, given those circumstances, then we wouldn't build the plant." Or, as he put it to our friend from the Toronto Star, it would have been done, done, done.

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So the real question is, will the Progressive Conservative Party talk about its decision-making? Will they table—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

TUITION

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: My question is to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. Over the last seven years, the Liberal government has hit Ontario college and university students with up to a 70% increase in tuition. It is becoming more and more difficult for families to send their children to college and university.

Does the minister think another tuition hike at more than twice the rate of inflation is acceptable?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I thank the member for what is a very good and important question. The member will know we're in the process now of working with students and post-secondary stakeholders towards a new tuition framework. I certainly will welcome the views of the party opposite and the member as we try to strike that balance between affordability and quality. It is an important balance, and I know the member opposite knows that.

Look, we're in tough fiscal times, but despite that, our 30% tuition grant is assisting more than 200,000 low-and middle-income students across this province. This was ambitious, Mr. Speaker, but we've done it, and we've done it within our fiscal targets.

I'm looking forward to working with the member opposite, I'm looking forward to working with students and I'm looking forward to working with our post-secondary partners to strike the right balance.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Back to the minister: Ontario students were hit with a tuition increase of up to 70% by this government, and the minister knows that the government's failed tuition rebate is helping fewer than one in three students.

With an average undergrad tuition of over \$7,100—the highest and the fastest tuition growing in Canada—why is the minister allowing yet another tuition hike of up to 5%?

Hon. Brad Duguid: That's a decision that's yet to be made, and it's going to be a decision for which I certainly will welcome the views of the member opposite and her party, as I will the views of students and parents across the province.

It is a balance, and I think the member appreciates that. It's a balance between affordability and quality. We'll make sure and we'll try to work as best we can with the member opposite to strike the right balance.

But I will also ask the member opposite to be realistic. The NDP are quoted as saying they want to extend the 30% off tuition to all students. That would take dollars that are going to low- and middle-income students and transfer them to the richer students. I'm not sure we want to go there. They're also calling for an outright freeze in tuition, something that would be nice to do, but I ask where the money would come from. Thirdly, they're suggesting that we waive student debt. That's billions and billions and billions of dollars that I don't think we have right now to do that. We'd love to do it—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

AIR-RAIL LINK

Mrs. Laura Albanese: My question is for the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Construction is currently under way on the UP Express that will connect Pearson International Airport to Union Station. This project is a critical project for the people in the riding of York South-Weston and for the communities that live along the line. This project will provide much-needed potential revitalization in this part of Toronto.

As you are aware, I have strongly advocated to the province, together with my community, the importance of a clean, efficient and electrified UP Express. Metrolinx has indicated that the earliest we could expect the line to be electrified would be 2017.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, can the minister discuss this date and provide an update on the status of the project?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: This government is very, very committed to electrification and sees this as a priority. We have made a very strong commitment here to Canada's two busiest transportation hubs, Union Station and

Pearson International Airport. This will provide high-quality travel between the two.

The member is quite right: The earliest date that we can achieve electrification would be 2017. I'm very committed to working with her to realize that time frame. As we develop the infrastructure and the investment strategy with Metrolinx, we will be trying to fully realize these projects right on time.

In the meantime, we are moving ahead with tier 4 diesel trains to be up express ready in time. I want to explain one thing very quickly: These are 75% cleaner than the standard GO diesels we run today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Laura Albanese: Thank you to the minister for clarifying the earliest date to electrify the line. As I mentioned earlier, this is of great importance to my constituents in York South-Weston and to all the communities that live along the corridor. It's also great news to learn more about the progress of the project.

The minister also touched upon the environmental assessment for electrification being well under way. Many of my constituents would like to learn more about that process. Mr. Speaker, through you, could the minister tell this House what the study includes and when we can expect the EA to be concluded?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: The member is quite right: The environmental assessment is under way right now. We are moving forward with it as quickly as the rules allow. We are also working right now to build the capacity on the Georgetown line that will allow electrification; this isn't like you can turn a light switch on and off. This government is very committed to running higher quality, cleaner vehicles across our rail and GO system and to building the capacity needed for electrification. We've also got both convertible vehicles that will be changed—those engines will be changed to electrical—and the line is being built to the capacity and the standards and specs for electrification.

I live half a block from the CN/CP/GO main line and the Gardiner freeway. That goes through many of the constituencies here. We also have to look at the Lakeshore line and improve environmental standards. This government has closed coal plants. I remember when I came back to Ontario 10 years ago, we had over 50 smog days that summer in Toronto. Those days are behind us because of these kinds of measures.

SCHOOL EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is to the Premier. Last week, Premier, you declared victory on extracurricular activities. At the time, I warned you not to pop the champagne or pat yourself on the back. Your caucus went into an absolute frenzy on the floor of this chamber when you were excited to get your extracurriculars back. Yet I warned you that not all high school teachers agreed to resume coaching and leading our school activities. Then, on Thursday, the announcement came, just as I

told you, that ETFO was going to refuse to restore extracurricular activities.

Just like in 2009, when you personally, as education minister, removed extra extracurricular activities from the role of the teacher, you have again taken the side of a union. You are letting them run the education system; you refuse to support a reasonable or sensible or workable solution to get extracurricular activities back in our schools.

Premier, what is plan B? Since your Harvard-trained mediation skills have failed us, and you have refused to adopt the Ontario PC plan, how do you say you're going to restore extracurricular activities this—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the Minister of Education.

Hon. Liz Sandals: Yes, I'm actually pleased to report that, in fact, we do have extracurricular activities coming back in the public secondary schools. Of course, we also have extracurricular activities happening in the French schools of the province and the English Catholic schools in the province.

Now, obviously, we are disappointed that the elementary teachers' federation made a different decision. Certainly, we look forward to continuing to talk with them. What I do find encouraging is that, as you look around the province, we find that teachers really do want to re-engage with their students and come back to making schools a great place to learn.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Speaker, extracurricular activities are not fully restored in our high schools, and they are not anywhere to be seen in our elementary schools. Parents are taxpayers; they expect you to do your job. Unfortunately, you had a stunning role reversal since the time you were the public trustee for the province, until you became a minister, when you actually supported the Ontario PC plan.

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But I go back to your Premier. She is partly responsible for kids losing their extracurricular activities. First, she removed the extracurricular activities from the role of a teacher when she was education minister. Then she failed to have the unions restore those extracurricular activities. Finally, when given the opportunity this time last week to support an Ontario Progressive Conservative motion to get those back in our classrooms, she stood up and she voted against them. Stubborn, naive or in the pocket of the unions—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Question?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: —one thing: She is not letting our kids do what they need to be doing in their schools. They're losing out.

Will the Premier do the right thing? She can leave here today and she can adopt the Ontario PC motion and get those extracurriculars back in our schools.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister of Education?

Hon. Liz Sandals: Actually, if I supported the Ontario PC plan, I wouldn't be a Liberal MPP today, if you really want to get your facts straight. That's in part because of the contrast in the way we feel about our teachers.

We recognize that our teachers are our front-line professionals and we want to work with them. We recognize that teachers are the people who actually want to get back to extracurriculars, who want to do those positive things that make our schools a great place to learn. We know we have relationships to repair and we know the teachers understand that, and that the teachers also want to do some repairing of the relationship with the parents and the students.

They may have a sort of in-your-face way of approaching things; we want to work collaboratively with everyone, including school boards, principals and—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question?

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. On Friday I was called to London by a distraught Ontarian whose 93-year-old parents have been separated by the long-term-care system after 67 years of marriage. More than anything, Mrs. Simone Price wants to live out her golden years with her husband, Everett Price.

This family's cry for help to the government went unanswered. But since they went public with the story, the Minister of Health now seems to agree with New Democrats that "it's the right thing to do" to accommodate the Prices.

My question is a simple one: When will the government make this right and reunite Mr. and Mrs. Price?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, of course we all want couples to be together if at all possible. That's why we've made significant changes in our long-term-care homes so that spouses who had been separated in the past are now together. Spousal reunification has been a real godsend to many of those couples who had been separated in long-term-care homes.

This issue is one that I am looking very closely at. We've come a long way when both partners are in a long-term-care home. The question now is, what can we do to bring couples together where one is in long-term care and one is in the community? My heart goes out to this family and to all the others who are really wanting to be together with their spouse.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: According to the government, as the minister has just mentioned, spousal reunification is one of the highest priorities of the Long-Term Care Act. The health minister appears to agree with New Democrats, but nice words aren't enough.

Mr. and Mrs. Price actually lived in the same location until Mrs. Price ended up in hospital. Now, as she's coming out of hospital and needs to have long-term care, all of a sudden, a 70-year relationship is going to be torn apart, because the system simply will not allow the rules to enable these two people to go back to the same place they used to live before. It doesn't make sense.

I want to know from the government when their nice words will turn into real actions for Mr. and Mrs. Price in London.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, this is an issue that has been raised when I have visited places where there is both a long-term-care home and a retirement home on the same site. This is an issue that's been brought forward, for example, when I was in Kitchener-Waterloo, visiting a Schlegel home there. It was an issue that people raised in that venue and others.

What I can say is I want people who have been together for so many decades to be together as long as possible. We've got some work to do to make that happen, but we're doing that work.

NORTHERN ECONOMY

Mr. Phil McNeely: My question is to the Minister of Natural Resources. Ontarians recognize the importance of northern Ontario and that the people there should be heard from and have their concerns addressed. We all know that this Premier and this government is ready to work for everyone and is listening to all Ontarians, including how we can realize the potential of the resources that northern Ontario has to offer. Can the Minister of Natural Resources tell all of us what this government has done and will do to hear from northerners, and how they can be part of our strong and growing economy?

Hon. David Orazietti: I want to thank the member for the question. For many northerners, the MNR is a ministry with which they have a high level of contact. Whether individuals are obtaining an Outdoors Card to hunt and fish or enjoy one of our 334 provincial parks, we are working to modernize the way we deliver these services. We're also working with our partners in industry, including the Ontario Forest Industries Association, to promote economic development in the north, while responsibly managing our province's natural resources.

Just last week, we held a cabinet meeting in northern Ontario, in my riding of Sault Ste. Marie, to allow cabinet ministers the opportunity to hear first-hand from northerners and individuals and organizations with whom they interact. I certainly want to express my appreciation and support to my colleagues for taking the time to do that. It demonstrated very clearly our government's commitment to listening to northern residents about their distinct and unique challenges and the opportunities in northern Ontario.

I also want to say, Speaker, it certainly fulfills the commitment that the Premier has made, holding a cabinet meeting in northern Ontario. We're very grateful for that. Thank you.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Phil McNeely: Thank you, Speaker, and back to the Minister of Natural Resources. I know that expanding economic development in Ontario's north has been identified as a key priority for our government, and the Ministry of Natural Resources plays a significant role in that. Northern Ontario is a place of unimaginable potential in many ways. It holds the key to continuing our economic growth.

In order to create more good jobs in the region, we must focus on development of more paths to employment, including those for young people in aboriginal communities in the north. Can the member please tell the members of this House about the creation of the new cabinet committee and share what our government is doing to promote economic development across northern Ontario?

Hon. David Orazietti: To the Minister of Northern Development and Mines.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Of course, being from Thunder Bay, in northwestern Ontario—a part of the world that I love so much and fought so hard for—I could not be more excited or proud of the direction our government is taking under Premier Wynne. Certainly, we are continuing to invest in the construction of better transportation routes and better infrastructure, and in terms of our blueprint vision for the northern Ontario growth plan, we are fully committed to implementing that landmark document.

As the Premier did announce on Friday, there will be a new northern cabinet committee chaired by our colleague Bill Mauro, from Thunder Bay—Atikokan. This will really bring a true northern lens to all government policy. May I say to the opposition members that this committee is going to be reaching out to opposition members, with other stakeholders—municipal stakeholders—as we work to improve transportation, create jobs and ensure a bright future for every person in northern Ontario.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Monte McNaughton: My question today is for the Minister of Finance. The month of January marked the 73rd straight month that Ontario's unemployment rate has been higher than the national average.

Last week, we learned that Diamond Aircraft in London is laying off another 200 workers at its plant; this is on top of the hundreds of people who were laid off in 2011. Minister, as you know, Diamond Aircraft is owned by Medrarr Financial Group, which operates out of Dubai. Was your decision to invest \$10 million into this Dubai-owned company because Diamond Aircraft has been a significant contributor to the Liberal Party of Ontario going back to 2005?

Hon. Charles Sousa: To the Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I thank the member opposite for the question. Of course, I already spoke to this last week. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to it again. Ob-

viously, we're very concerned for the future of the employees and their families.

We did make an investment to Diamond of \$5 million; in fact, the federal government also made a similar investment. Our investment in 2006, over the five-year term of that agreement, they met all of the benchmarks for job creation and for sustaining employment in London. In fact, with the recent announcement, I'm also encouraged to hear that the president and the CEO have said they want to hire back as many employees as possible as quickly as possible, but the exact number and timing has yet to be determined.

1130

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Back to the minister: Diamond Aircraft has been used by your government as a showpiece example of corporate welfare strategy. Unfortunately for those workers at Diamond Aircraft, much like those at WindTronics, Knorr Brake and Digital Extremes, your method of picking winners and losers is failing badly. Diamond Aircraft is laying off 200 people in London after you have given it millions of dollars through your failed corporate welfare program. Coincidentally, this Dubai-owned company has donated thousands upon thousands of dollars to the Liberal Party of Ontario. Coincidence? We think not.

Tell us, Minister, just how many other corporate welfare recipients have been donors to the Ontario Liberal Party? Will you also promise to wash your party's dirty hands and return your party's donations back to the Middle East?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Frankly, it's very disappointing that the member opposite continues to disparage our private sector and not be interested in job creation at all.

A year ago, last February, the PC Party continued to talk about their opposition to what they refer to as corporate welfare. In fact, the member opposite would be interested in this quote where, even in his own riding of Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, a local politician there representing the constituents said, "Local business owners do perfectly well without handouts from Queen's Park." That local politician was you, actually. It might come as a surprise to Lambton Conveyer, which is the first recipient of funds from the southwestern Ontario development fund, which is creating 110 new jobs in your riding.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. Michael Mantha: My question is to the Premier. Several weeks ago, Premier, MPAC ruled that the town of Espanola must pay pulp and paper giant Domtar \$4 million following a property reassessment of its Espanola mill. Domtar is one of the world's largest pulp and paper companies, with revenues of \$5.6 billion in 2011 alone.

When a small community such as Espanola is forced to retroactively cough up a good part of its tax base to repay a global giant such as Domtar, what is the Premier prepared to do to fix the flawed MPAC reassessment process?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know the Minister of Finance will want to speak to this issue, but I want to make a general comment about the economic viability of small communities, particularly small communities in the north.

Having been Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and having been Minister of Transportation, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of initiatives that we have put in place to work with communities to make sure that they have the capacity to deliver the services that they need in their communities and to make sure that they can keep their infrastructure in place. We have worked with municipalities to make sure they can develop asset management plans, Mr. Speaker. We are very, very committed to continuing to invest in roads and bridges and that kind of infrastructure that's needed because it's about economic development; it's about making sure that small communities have the capacity to have the economy that they need to sustain their constituents.

I know the Minister of Finance will want to speak to the specifics of the assessment, but economic development and the capacity to be viable is at the root of this—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Mantha: Once again my question is to the Premier. Although the Premier was just in Sault Ste. Marie for her cabinet photo op, it's clear she doesn't understand the challenges facing northerners. Communities such as Dryden, Elk Lake, Fort Frances, just to name a few, are watching these decisions very carefully, and they are concerned with the impact that MPAC is going to have on their communities. Residents of Espanola simply cannot afford a 50% tax increase or to pay Domtar.

Will the Premier commit to reviewing the reassessment process and, in particular, this devastating decision for Espanola and other communities in northern Ontario?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: The province does understand some of the implications that you speak of. It's critical that we do review these things going forward. We understand the impact it has, and we understand also the necessity for those municipalities to be well served.

There's only one taxpayer in this system. We know that the assessment has been put forward, and we have made a commitment to have it reviewed. We have sat down with some of the stakeholders on some of the initiatives already, and we'll continue to do so. I do appreciate you bringing it forward, even last week, and we'll make every effort to move forward on that issue.

CHILDHOOD OBESITY

Ms. Soo Wong: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. I was privileged to serve as a trustee for several years in my riding of Scarborough-Agincourt. Something that I have always been concerned about and advocate for is healthy living for our kids. It is important for kids to have the ability to learn at school and grow up to be healthy.

We know that we have a challenge in Ontario. Obesity rates have risen significantly, and we know obesity leads to heart disease and diabetes. Researchers say this generation of children could actually live shorter lives than their parents. This is why I'm very proud to have run as a Liberal in 2011, with an ambitious goal to reduce childhood obesity.

Through you, Speaker, to the minister: How are we, as a government, going to fulfill this commitment?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you to the member from Scarborough-Agincourt for her energy and thoughtfulness as a member of the Healthy Kids panel.

We all love our kids. We want our kids to be healthy, not just when they are young, but as they grow up, too. But we know that too many of our kids are not as healthy as they could be, and that has serious consequences for our health care system.

As a first step in helping our kids be healthier, I went to the experts. I'm very proud that today the Healthy Kids panel has released an excellent report based on the best available evidence and with thoughtful recommendations. As a starting point, we're going to form an inter-ministerial working group that will direct the government's actions on implementing many of the report's key recommendations. It will be co-chaired by me and Minister Piruzza, the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Speaker, we will be working with all our colleagues, but I have to underline that this report is an excellent resource, not just for government, but for families, for parents and for anybody who cares about the health of our kids.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Soo Wong: This is a good start. However, the challenges we face together are significant. Some 25% of health care costs are due to preventable illnesses. Nearly half of cancer deaths are related to tobacco use, diet and lack of physical activity. Obesity has a direct effect on the rates of type 2 diabetes, and diabetes costs Ontario \$4.9 billion. Currently, over 50% of adults in Ontario and about 20% of our youth are overweight.

Through you, Speaker, to the minister: What action is being taken right now to address these significant challenges?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, there is no one single recommendation that will solve all of the problems. We need action on all fronts if we're going to make progress. We currently spend more than \$500 million a year on initiatives and programs that directly and indirectly support Ontarians to lead healthier and active lives.

We've already taken steps to help Ontarians live healthy lives, such as the Student Nutrition Program. It has provided over 630,000 students with nutritious breakfasts, snacks and lunches within Ontario. We also encourage healthy eating through the Foodland Ontario program and our farmer's market support to get fresh fruit grown by our farmers to consumers. The children's activity tax credit allows parents to claim up to \$526 of expenses related to enrolling their kids in activities.

Speaker, there is much more to do. The Healthy Kids panel report gives us very good advice on how to move forward.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for London—Fanshawe on a point of order.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Thank you, Speaker. I would like to correct the record—with average undergrad tuition over \$7,100, the highest and the fastest-growing in Canada.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): As members all know, anyone at any time can correct their own record, and I thank the member for doing so.

USE OF QUESTION PERIOD

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I want to make one quick comment before we dismiss, and that is that I've noticed an unfortunate trend in the House, and I'm going to ask you to stop. That trend is to call members by their names, even when you're heckling, and even using unfortunate nicknames. That does not race to the top. That is what has caused what I've been telling you about, and that is the personal comments that are being made. Refer to members either by their role or their riding. The second thing is, on the personal side, by not doing so, it races to the top.

So I would ask all members to abide by this by not calling members by their name, particularly when they're heckling, and particularly using nicknames.

There are no deferred votes. This House stands adjourned until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1140 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I rise today to welcome a number of my constituents from the great riding of Oxford who are here this week to meet with members of the Legislature regarding their concerns about water quality and their concerns about a proposed landfill site. I want to commend them for their efforts, and I hope that many members will take the time to meet with them this week.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. I will make a comment on that because I didn't even hear a name. When we introduce people, the sole purpose is to introduce people and not to make a statement. So I'm going to remind all not to do that.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

DRIVE CLEAN

Mr. Michael Harris: Today, I rise to express the frustration of Ontarians with the Liberal government's new and technically flawed Drive Clean test.

Up until the Liberals introduced this computerized testing method on January 1, 95% of vehicles met the program's requirements as a result of improved technology and standards. But that didn't stop the Liberals from rushing to introduce a new computerized testing method that they knew would create an artificial spike in the failure rate for emissions tests.

Now, every day, countless vehicles fail this new test—not because of emissions-related problems but because of a computer error. Rather than address these technical issues, the Liberals have told Ontarians to spend their valuable time and money driving on highways and around town in the hopes that their vehicle's onboard computer will correct itself for the next test.

What's truly unfortunate is that the Liberals gave no thought to the unwarranted financial hardship and stress these false fails would have on drivers and car dealers. Clearly, it's time to phase the program out. In less than one month of launching scrapdriveclean.ca, over 1,500 people have completed our online petition calling for the program to be eliminated.

I would like to encourage all Ontarians who want this technically flawed test put to an end to sign our online petition today or to fill out the downloaded petition form—scrapdriveclean.ca.

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Gilles Bisson: We've listened to this government now, in three budgets—probably three or four—and at least two throne speeches, talk about the wonderful opportunity that presents itself in the Ring of Fire in northern Ontario. We have some of the best mineralogical ability in that particular part of the province when it comes to chromite, when it comes to nickel, when it comes to other metals.

We're looking at this government and saying, "Where have you been for the last three or four years?" There is an opportunity here to position Ontario as a stainless steel producer. You need chromite, you need nickel and you need iron ore, all things that belong here in Ontario, and if all we're trying to do is to create a mine up in the Ring of Fire, I think we're selling Ontario short. We should be trying to position this as a stainless steel play for the province of Ontario.

Imagine if we can mine the minerals that exist in the Ring of Fire, that we can ship them to facilities here in Ontario that not only transform them to chromite, but bring them from chromite all the way to stainless steel, we have an opportunity to create, in this province, an economic powerhouse that will be able to help this province for years to come. This is not an industry that will be there for five or 10 years; it's an industry that will be there for 100 years.

I look at this government and I say to myself, "Where have you been?" It seems to me they're trying to downplay the potential of the Ring of Fire. So I say to this government, we should really be looking at positioning this as the Ring of Fire is moving into production. We should be looking at how we position

this so that we can be in the stainless steel business here in Ontario.

FLORENCE AND WILLEM SCHURMAN

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I want to take this opportunity to congratulate Richmond Hill residents Florence and Willem Schurman on their 71st wedding anniversary. Mr. and Mrs. Schurman were recently honoured by Worldwide Marriage Encounter as the longest-married couple in Ontario.

I first met Flo and Bill while canvassing as the provincial Liberal candidate in the former riding of Oak Ridges. I was really fortunate to have the support of these experienced volunteers during the 2003 general election. Passionate about politics, the couple has been volunteering on political campaigns since the 1960s.

Flo, now 89, and Bill, 94, say that the secret to their long-lasting relationship is simple: Never part on an angry word.

Since first meeting as neighbours in Richmond Hill, they've built a full life together. Through the turbulent years of the Second World War, they raised a large family of six children, and they now have 12 grandchildren and five great-grandchildren. As active members of the community contributing to horticultural and historical societies, Flo was honoured as Richmond Hill's Senior of the Year in 2005.

Today, the couple continues to live in their own seniors' apartment. I, along with my colleague MPP Reza Moridi, want to thank them for helping make Richmond Hill a great community in which to live. Congratulations, Flo and Bill.

LEGISLATIVE INTERNS

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I rise to give recognition to the Ontario Legislative Internship Programme, and particularly the intern I had the pleasure of hosting in my office, Beth Elder.

What is unique about the OLIP program is that the interns choose the MPP, not the other way around. I feel honoured to have been selected by Beth as her first-term host MPP.

Beth is originally from Calgary, but moved to Toronto to attend the University of Toronto. She used her experience as an intern to discover the great opportunities in rural Ontario, particularly Huron-Bruce.

I can't say enough good things about Beth's work in our office. She's a very quick study who was planning large events, writing press releases and doing fantastic research. Beth visited the great riding of Huron-Bruce on numerous occasions, learning about the opportunities and the challenges rural Ontario is facing.

I recommend the internship program, not only to other graduates interested in pursuing a career in the political world, but to my colleagues here in the Legislature as well.

Beth departed our office last month, and her presence is already greatly missed. She has a really bright future

ahead of her and I wanted to take a moment to thank her for all she did. I wish her the best of luck as she pursues her current placement, and in her future endeavours as well.

PEEL MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I had the opportunity to recently attend a town hall meeting regarding the Peel Memorial Hospital in my riding in the region of Brampton. The region of Peel is expected to pay \$120 million out of the \$420-million cost to redevelop this hospital. Now, it's simply unacceptable to expect a municipality to fund this high of a cost for a project which the province of Ontario has the mandate to fund—stitutions such as hospitals and schools.

The Liberal government has been campaigning on the issue of revitalizing this hospital since 2007. Now, promise after promise has been broken. To date, a comprehensive plan with funding has not been announced by this provincial government; we do not have a concrete start date or completion date. This is yet another example of the Liberal government's track record of broken promises.

The people of Brampton need two hospitals. They deserve two hospitals. It's a municipality of over 500,000 people. Now we need to see some actual funding, some concrete funding, to ensure that this promise is not yet another empty promise and there's actually something concrete to it.

ORGAN DONATION

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Each year, more than 2,000 people in Ontario have their lives saved or enhanced through organ donations. You may have recently heard about Keith Childerhouse from the town of Oakville. Keith was diagnosed with diffuse panbronchiolitis 15 years ago and is currently on the road to recovery now after receiving a brand new set of lungs. His wife, Sarah, has been a great promoter of organ donation awareness, turning to social media to encourage Ontarians to sign up for the Be a Donor campaign. The Be a Donor campaign seeks to raise awareness about the impact of organ donation, as well as the need for recipients to register and discuss their wishes concerning organ donation with their own families.

In 2012, there was a record number of organ transplants performed in Ontario. However, less than 25% of Ontarians are currently registered as organ donors.

Community leaders in my riding, led by Jennifer Malabar, an organ recipient, have been running a successful local campaign to raise the number of registered donors in Oakville. They've also challenged other communities to do exactly the same.

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Today, Speaker, I encourage all members to take on that challenge and encourage their constituents to sign up for the Be a Donor campaign at beadonor.ca so we can

hear more successful stories similar to Keith and Jennifer's.

DON MCVITIE

Mr. Norm Miller: Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to congratulate a very deserving constituent from my riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka. On Friday, February 22 here at Queen's Park, Don McVittie was awarded the Lieutenant Governor's Ontario Heritage Award for lifetime achievement.

I couldn't think of a more fitting honour for a person who has done so much over the past 25 years for the preservation, protection and restoration of Parry Sound–Muskoka's proud heritage. As a volunteer, Don has been extremely generous with his time. He has contributed immensely to the Muskoka Heritage Foundation and Trust, the Parry Sound–Muskoka Stewardship Council and the Muskoka Watershed Council. A champion of the great outdoors, Don is personally responsible for the planting of over 150,000 trees and has been a strong supporter of local Scout troops and their own tree-planting initiatives.

Don is also a lifetime member of the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters and donated a number of wildlife displays to the OFAH Mario Cortellucci Hunting and Fishing Heritage Centre to support its opening in 2010.

Future generations will benefit from Don's contributions, and I would like to personally congratulate him on this prestigious award. Congratulations, Don.

QUEEN ELIZABETH II DIAMOND JUBILEE MEDAL

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: It was my privilege as a member of provincial Parliament to present the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal to 13 worthy individuals. This commemorative medal was created to mark the 60th anniversary of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's ascension to the throne.

The individuals who received the medal were from varied backgrounds. They had made significant contributions to our community, our province and our country. They are Lynn Petrushchak, Asha Luthra, Shelley White, Joginder Grewal, Ronald Cunningham, Sunita Malik, Didi Kaneff, Peter St. Denis, Mir Sultan, Brigadier General Gregory Young, Joga Chahal, Sabita Maraj and Alok Goel.

I express my heartiest congratulations to each one of them and their families for making our province a better place to live, work, play, invest and raise a family.

NUTRITION MONTH

Mrs. Christine Elliott: It's my pleasure to rise today on behalf of Tim Hudak and the entire PC caucus to recognize March as Nutrition Month in Canada. This year's theme focuses on helping consumers make healthy

choices at the grocery store, advising us to plan, shop, cook and enjoy healthy foods.

Nutrition Month is also an opportunity for us to recognize the phenomenal work of registered dietitians. These committed health professionals not only use their expertise to translate the science of nutrition into practical advice for Ontarians but also treat nutrition-related conditions and support clients to self-manage their care. The unique training and skill sets of registered dietitians makes them valuable partners in containing health care costs by preventing and managing chronic conditions.

With increasing rates of diabetes and other chronic conditions, the need for access to dietitians' expertise continues to grow. Although Nutrition Month is formally recognized in March, it's important that we keep in mind the importance of nutrition to health throughout the entire year.

I want to thank the Registered Dietitians of Ontario for bringing attention to this important cause, and I wish you all the best as you pursue a healthier future for all Ontarians.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

TERRA PAVING INC. ACT, 2013

Mr. Shurman moved first reading of the following bill: Bill Pr5, An Act to revive Terra Paving Inc.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to standing order 86, this bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

UNIVERSAL HEALTH CONSULTING INC. ACT, 2013

Mr. O'Toole moved first reading of the following bill: Bill Pr12, An Act to revive Universal Health Consulting Inc.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to standing order 86, this bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

ASPEN DRYWALL INC. ACT, 2013

Mr. O'Toole moved first reading of the following bill: Bill Pr14, An Act to revive Aspen Drywall Inc.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to standing order 86, this bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

SOCIAL WORKERS

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I rise today to mark the beginning of Social Work Week. It's a week recognized across Canada to pay tribute to the ongoing contribution social workers make every day to the front lines, assisting and supporting people, often in times of crisis.

The occasion was established by the Canadian Association of Social Workers more than two decades ago. In Ontario, Social Work Week is marked during the first week of March. This year's theme, "Restoring Hope: The Power of Social Work," was chosen to highlight the role that social workers play in helping to restore hope for their clients and their communities. Ontario's social workers do this by providing a wide range of services to people in need, from offering counselling to providing referrals to other resources in the community.

The Ontario government funds a range of social services to assist people in need, but it is often social workers who actually transform our policies and programs into services for people every day in communities all across Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, I know that social work is a proud and noble profession, as I myself have a master's degree in this field. In fact, in my final graduate school year, my study field placement was actually here at Queen's Park. So I worked alongside many social workers before I became an MPP, and have done much social work since I became an MPP—I can assure you, we all have. I know first-hand how challenging this work can be, and how it can also be so incredibly rewarding in helping to offer hope to people and to rebuild their lives.

I'm proud that our government has supported social workers in offering that hope. In 2009, the government made changes to allow those who have earned their doctorate degree in social work to use the title "Doctor" when providing health care to individuals. Social workers authorized to provide psychotherapy services will also be able to use the title "psychotherapist."

The Ontario Labour Mobility Act is another example of how our government supports the profession of social work. We brought in this change as part of a national agreement ensuring that qualified workers can have their credentials recognized anywhere in Canada. It means that when a social worker who is already registered or licensed in another Canadian province applies for registration as a social worker in Ontario, they will no longer need to have additional training, experience, examinations or assessments. This agreement gives social work-

ers more flexibility when making important career choices.

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Our government is proud to support social workers. As we join the Ontario Association of Social Workers in recognizing this special week, I want to thank all of Ontario's social workers for all that they do to enhance the quality of life for countless individuals and their families all across Ontario. Thank you very much.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It is now time for responses.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Speaker, hope does spring eternal, and as we heard, the theme for Social Work Week is "Restoring Hope: The Power of Social Work."

The Ontario Association of Social Workers have indicated that this year's theme was adopted because of the role that social workers play in helping not only clients but also communities and society restore and build on a sense of hope. So hope does spring eternal, even under this present government.

Social workers do offer hope for people, and it's rooted in a very practical problem-solving approach. We do recognize the power of social work to help people reignite that sense of hope and to better enable them to deal with challenges in their lives.

At its most basic, counselling is an approach to help people help themselves to solve their own problems. I say that with some authority. I also have an indirect connection. My wife is a psychiatric social worker, an MSW from Chicago, at Aurora.

Compassion is really part of this province's defining characteristic, and it does mean helping people to reach their full potential, not condemning them to a life of dependency. Allocating a week to social work generates discussion about how we can better serve our most vulnerable citizens in the most cost-effective manner. We must refocus. We must set priorities, concentrate on our social welfare services, but most importantly, focus on the elderly, the sick, the disabled—those who are truly disadvantaged.

For over 200 years in this jurisdiction, individuals, families and churches have helped one another with minimal government assistance. Beyond the social work profession, we all have a duty to help the truly disadvantaged, those who have been reduced to the lowest depths of poverty and distress, particularly those with a disability, who are perhaps on a program through no fault of their own.

It's time to wake up Ontario's social welfare system. To do this, we need approaches and programs laden with fresh, cost-effective ideas, ever bearing in mind the complexity of the issues we're dealing with.

Some issues: For six straight years, Ontario's unemployment rate has been higher than the national average. We have 300,000 people living in poverty. For over a decade, spending on social services has increased by 67%. There's a lot we can do with the \$10 billion a year that is allocated to this particular ministry—\$10 billion; very significant. It pales in comparison only to the health

budget, the education budget and the interest we pay on the debt.

So many issues: addictions—that was my background for 20 years—mental health issues, unemployment, poverty. They all contribute to these health care costs, to burdens on our police forces and to diminished educational outcomes. This, in turn, inhibits productivity, labour force flexibility, lifespans, economic expansion and social progress. All of this takes place at a huge cost to taxpayers.

Therefore, we have to tap into a profession like social workers and other individuals who can offer creative, innovative thinking. Those who work in the field better understand how we can redesign Ontario's services, obviously, to be better, more effective and more focused. We have published a white paper on this subject. I encourage people to give us a call. Those on the front lines should continue to be invited to contribute.

Speaker, the vision remains an effective, affordable and accountable service system that supports and invests in families and communities, where adults are as independent as they can be, where children are safe and where support is provided to those most in need.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's an honour and a privilege to rise in recognition of those who work on the front lines with some of our society's most entrenched problems and how they work their way out into the lives of human beings. Those are our social workers.

It's really quite fitting that the theme is "Restoring Hope."

Certainly, we in the New Democratic Party and our leader, Andrea Horwath, want to acknowledge the incredible service and the incredible dedication of our social workers across the province.

It's not all good news, though. We have a slightly different tack from the government in how we can help our social workers, and that is to say that the best way of helping our social workers is to help their clients. The best way of helping their clients is to help those who really have lost in terms of the social determinants of health—and I'm talking about poverty.

I'll give you two very pungent examples. Two of the social work organizations that I've worked with closely and that I have a great deal of respect and honour for are, for example, Victim Services—just around the corner and down the street, housed by the police because they can't afford their own lodging. Victim Services is the only agency in Toronto and the GTA that goes out with the police when there's a domestic violence incident, when there are crimes mainly and mostly against women. This is their sorry state of affairs, Mr. Speaker: They haven't had a funding increase for 20 years. In fact, the funding per victim for Victim Services has gone from \$286 per victim in 1990 to \$31 in 2010.

Another organization I have a great deal of respect for: Parkdale Activity-Recreation Centre in my own riding. They deal with thousands of folks with mental health and addiction issues over the course of a year. They feed hundreds every week. Their cost increases—they provide supportive housing—have gone up 2% to 5% a year, yet

their supportive housing per diem has not increased since April 2009.

I suggest that the best way to help our social workers on the front lines is to help them by, first of all, funding them so that they can provide the help their clients need.

Also, it's about promise-keeping. For example, this government made some key commitments in 2008, and I'm just going to run through a couple of them. They promised to raise the Ontario Child Benefit—this helps children who live in poverty—to \$1,310 by 2013. It's 2013, and yet they're still funded at the 2009 level of \$1,100 per child. They promised to review social assistance to reduce barriers and increase opportunities, and yet from all the over 100 recommendations in the social assistance review, not one has been implemented to date. They promised to raise the minimum wage, yet no announcement has been made since it was increased to \$10.25 an hour. In fact, it has been frozen since March 2010. They promised \$45 million a year for three years for dental care for low-income Ontarians, yet in fact, eligible adults aren't eligible under the new program, and it was cut from \$10.3 million to \$3.3 million in 2011-12. They promised to initiate the process for the next five-year phase of the Poverty Reduction Strategy, and we have heard no concrete plans whatsoever this year.

Mr. Speaker, this is against the backdrop of six people dying on the streets of Toronto from homelessness since the beginning of January—over 700 since the 1980s, when it was considered a national disaster. We now step over the bodies, Mr. Speaker. These are the bodies that our social workers look after.

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Instead of stepping over the bodies, why don't we do something about it? Why don't we help our social workers? Why don't we fund them appropriately? Why don't we help people who are sleeping on grates? Why don't we help the one in seven children who are living in poverty?

It was sad to see the Minister of Children and Youth Services stand up to applause on what they're doing on the child poverty file. There's nothing to be proud about, Mr. Speaker, when one in seven children lives in poverty in this province.

So with all of that, I leave it to the capable hands of the new Minister of Community and Social Services to do something, because that's what our social workers need. They need this government to not just give them a week but to give them some time and, more importantly, Mr. Speaker, give them some money so they can do their work.

PETITIONS

HOSPITAL PARKING FEES

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to rise and present a petition on behalf of my constituents from Durham. It reads as follows:

“Whereas the United Senior Citizens of Ontario has expressed its concerns over the high costs of parking at hospitals in Ontario on behalf of its more than 300,000 members; and

“Whereas thousands of Ontario seniors find it difficult to live on their fixed income and cannot afford these extra hospital parking fees added to their daily living costs; and

“Whereas the Canadian Medical Association Journal recently “said in an editorial that parking fees are a barrier to health care and add ... stress to patients who have enough to deal with;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That Ontario’s members of provincial Parliament and” Kathleen Wynne’s “government take action to abolish parking fees for all seniors when visiting hospitals.”

I’m pleased to sign and support this—my constituents Florence Russell and George Clarke have signed the petition—and give it to page Jaden.

AIR QUALITY

Mr. Michael Harris: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario’s Drive Clean program was implemented only as a temporary measure to reduce high levels of vehicle emissions and smog; and

“Whereas vehicle emissions have declined so significantly from 1998 to 2010 that they are no longer among the major domestic contributors of smog in Ontario; and

“Whereas the overwhelming majority of reductions in vehicle emissions were, in fact, the result of factors other than the Drive Clean program, such as tighter manufacturing standards for emission-control technologies; and

“Whereas from 1999 to 2010 the percentage of vehicles that failed emissions testing under the Drive Clean program steadily declined from 16% to 5%; and

“Whereas the environment minister has ignored advances in technology and introduced a new, computerized emissions test that is less reliable and prone to error; and

“Whereas the new Drive Clean test no longer assess tailpipe emissions, but instead scans the on-board diagnostics systems of vehicles, which already perform a series of continuous and periodic emissions checks; and

“Whereas the new Drive Clean test has caused the failure rate to double in less than two months as a result of technical problems with the new emissions testing method; and

“Whereas this new emissions test has caused numerous false ‘Fail’ results, which have resulted in the overcharging of testing fees for Ontario drivers and car dealerships, thereby causing unwarranted economic hardship and stress;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“That the Minister of the Environment must take immediate steps to begin phasing out the Drive Clean program.”

Speaker, I approve and endorse this petition and will affix my name to it and send it down to you with Joshua.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please.

I have to provide a reminder for people presenting petitions that they should be stamped ahead of time, and that that’s understood. The reason for that is to ensure that they are properly recorded in the record for the constituents who sign them. If they’re not stamped, they don’t get submitted. So as a reminder, please submit your petitions to the table beforehand to be verified.

As a reminder, there’s a generic form that shows you how to write it, because it has to be done on one page. It can’t be two or more pages. I’m just offering that as a reminder to all of our members.

We’ll continue with petitions.

OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN

Miss Monique Taylor: This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario Ombudsman, who is an officer of the Legislature, is not allowed to provide trusted, independent investigations of complaints against children’s aid societies; and

“Whereas Ontario is the only province in Canada not allowing their Ombudsman to investigate complaints against children’s aid societies; and

“Whereas people who feel they have been wronged by the actions of children’s aid societies are left feeling helpless with nowhere else to turn for help to correct systemic issues;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to grant the Ombudsman the power to investigate children’s aid societies.”

I fully support this petition. I will affix my name to it, along with the other thousands that have been submitted so far, and give it to page Olivia to bring to the table.

FAMILY SAFETY

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly, and it reads as follows:

“Whereas the Safer Families Program is a successful partnership of Catholic Family Services Peel-Dufferin, Family Services of Peel and the Peel Children’s Aid Society (CAS), receives year-to-year funding from the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services, and is a critical component of social services to families within the Peel community; and

“Whereas the intervention model for Safer Families currently operates with no waiting lists, an important consideration for families experiencing domestic violence and child protection concerns, as they require immediate access to service; and

"Whereas the Safer Families Program is aligned with Ontario's child poverty agenda, is committed to preventing violence against women, and contributes to community capacity building to support child welfare delivery; and

"Whereas currently, Safer Families serves 14% of all domestic violence cases referred to Peel Children's Aid Society and has the ability to double the number of cases it handles;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario adjust its funding to supply ongoing core funding rather than year-to-year funding, and realign funding to double the percentage of cases referred by the Peel Children's Aid Society and served by the Safer Families Program."

I am pleased to sign and support this petition and to send it with page Angela.

ONTARIO COLLEGE OF TRADES

Mr. Bill Walker: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario's tradespeople are subject to stifling regulation and are compelled to pay membership fees to the unaccountable College of Trades; and

"Whereas these fees are a tax grab that drives down the wages of skilled tradespeople; and

"Whereas Ontario desperately needs a plan to solve our critical shortage of skilled tradespeople by encouraging our youth to enter the trades and attracting new tradespeople; and

"Whereas the latest policies from the" Wynne-McGuinty "government only aggravate the looming skilled trades shortage in Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To immediately disband the College of Trades, cease imposing needless membership fees and enact policies to attract young Ontarians into skilled trade careers."

I support this and will send it with page Stacey to the Clerks' desk.

REPLACEMENT WORKERS

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition from all over Ontario.

"Whereas strikes and lockouts are rare: on average, 97% of collective agreements are negotiated without work disruption; and

"Whereas anti-temporary replacement workers laws have existed in Quebec since 1978; in British Columbia since 1993; and successive governments in those two provinces have never repealed those laws; and

"Whereas anti-temporary replacement workers legislation has reduced the length and divisiveness of labour disputes; and

"Whereas the use of temporary replacement workers during a strike or lockout is damaging to the social fabric

of a community in the short and the long term as well as the well-being of its residents;"

They "petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to enact legislation banning the use of temporary replacement workers during a strike or lockout."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it, and ask page A.J. to bring it to the Clerk.

LYME DISEASE

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the tick-borne illness known as chronic Lyme disease, which mimics many catastrophic illnesses such as multiple sclerosis, Crohn's, Alzheimer's, arthritic diabetes, depression, chronic fatigue and fibromyalgia, is increasingly endemic in Canada, but scientifically validated diagnostic tests and treatment choices are currently not available in Ontario, forcing patients to seek these in the USA and Europe;

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"Whereas the Canadian Medical Association informed the public, governments and the medical profession in the May 30, 2000, edition of its professional journal that Lyme disease is endemic throughout Canada, particularly in southern Ontario;

"Whereas the Ontario public health system and the Ontario Health Insurance Plan currently do not fund those specific tests that accurately serve the process for establishing a clinical diagnosis, but only recognize testing procedures known in the medical literature to provide false negatives 45% to 95% of the time;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to request the Minister of Health to direct the Ontario public health system and OHIP to include all currently available and scientifically verified tests for acute and chronic Lyme diagnosis, to do everything necessary to create public awareness of Lyme disease in Ontario, and to have internationally developed diagnostic and successful treatment protocols available to patients and physicians."

I totally agree with this petition, Speaker. I affix my signature, and I'll send this to the table with Alexander.

GREENWATER PARK

Mr. John Vanthof: I have this petition on behalf of hundreds of people who have signed it.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the present government of Ontario should reverse the closure of Greenwater provincial park in Cochrane, Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario reverse the closure of Greenwater provincial park, to allow the park to remain fully operational and open enabling people from all over to enjoy camping and visiting on its grounds as of the spring of 2013."

I wholeheartedly agree, add my signature, and hand it to page Justin.

WIND TURBINES

Ms. Laurie Scott: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Sprott Power, also known as Zero Emission People, Energy Farming Ontario Inc., and Wind Works, are proposing to construct 10 wind turbines, known as Settler’s Landing and/or Snowy Ridge Wind Parks within the city of Kawartha Lakes in order to produce up to 20 megawatts of power; and

“Whereas the proposed wind parks are to be located, in whole or in part, on the Oak Ridges moraine; and

“Whereas the location of the proposed wind parks will adversely affect wildlife populations, wildlife migration patterns, human health, and the natural environment; and

“Whereas the proposed wind parks will also reduce property values and the quality of life in the surrounding communities;

“Now therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“The government of Ontario live up to its throne speech commitment, and deny these applications in recognition of this not being a willing community for industrial wind turbines; and

“That the government announce an immediate moratorium on the further development of industrial wind turbines until complete studies have been completed into all direct and indirect health impacts associated with these projects.”

I have hundreds of signatures of the 1,000 I received on Saturday at the Rolling Hills Public School in Bethany.

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Jim McDonell: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Auditor General confirmed that no comprehensive evaluation was completed by the McGuinty”—Wynne—“government on the impact of the billion-dollar commitment of renewable energy on such things as net job losses and future energy prices, which will increase another 46% over the next five years; and

“Whereas poor decisions by the McGuinty government”—Wynne government—“such as the Green Energy Act, where Ontario pays up to 80 cents per kilowatt hour for electricity it doesn’t need and then must pay our neighbours to take it for free, and the billion-dollar cost of the seat-saving cancellation of the Oakville and Mississauga gas power plants, have contributed to making the cost of Ontario power the highest in North America; and

“Whereas there has been no third party study to look at the health, physical, social, economic and environmental impacts of wind turbines; and

“Whereas Ontario’s largest farm organizations, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture and the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario, have called for a suspension of industrial wind turbine development until the serious shortcomings can be addressed; and

“Whereas the McGuinty government has removed all decision-making powers from the local municipal governments when it comes to the location and size of industrial wind ... farms;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Liberal government support the MPP from Huron-Bruce Lisa Thompson’s private member’s motion, which calls for a moratorium on all industrial wind turbine development until a third party health and environmental study has been completed.”

I agree with this and will be signing it.

ELECTRICITY GENERATION

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I apologize to the member for Nickel Belt for overlooking her last time, and I recognize her with her petition.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I won’t hold it against you. So, here we go.

“Whereas ... the Ontario government completed a review of the feed-in tariff (FIT) renewable energy procurement program;

“Whereas the government stated ‘Active participation of communities is important to the continued success of the FIT program’ and the government acknowledged ‘most local community and aboriginal projects require more time to mobilize’;

“Whereas active participation can be achieved by mobilizing ‘community enterprises’ to assess local energy generation opportunities and this development model provides a very high ROI for Ontarians by making certain that surplus revenues are reinvested for the betterment of communities;

“Whereas a community energy act is necessary to overcome the hurdles to mobilization of community enterprises for electricity generation;

We petition the Legislative Assembly to “consider the need for a community energy act to help facilitate the mobilization of communities and financial resources for the purpose of developing community enterprises for electricity generation.”

This petition comes from the people of Nickel Belt, and I would be happy to submit it to the Clerk with Olivia.

LANDFILL

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I have a petition here signed by thousands of my constituents from the great riding of Oxford.

“Whereas many of the resources of this planet are finite and are necessary to sustain both life and quality of life for all future generations;

"Whereas the disposal of resources in landfills creates environmental hazards which will have significant human and financial costs for;

"Whereas all levels of government are elected to guarantee their constituents' physical, financial, emotional and mental well-being;

"Whereas the health risks to the community and watershed increase in direct relationship to the proximity to any landfill site;

"Whereas the placement of a landfill site in a limestone quarry has been shown to be detrimental;

"Whereas the placement of a landfill site in the headwaters of multiple highly vulnerable aquifers in detrimental;

"Whereas the county of Oxford has passed a resolution requesting a moratorium on landfill construction or approval;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, humbly petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To implement a moratorium in Oxford county on any future landfill construction or approval until such time as a full review of alternatives has been completed which would examine best practices in other jurisdictions around the world;

"That this review of alternatives would give special emphasis on (a) practices which involve the total recycling or composting of all products currently destined for landfill sites in Ontario and (b) the production of goods which can efficiently and practically be recycled or reused so as not to require disposal in landfills."

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to present this petition. I'll affix my signature to it.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

NON-PROFIT HOUSING CO-OPERATIVES STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT DES LOIS
EN CE QUI CONCERNE
LES COOPÉRATIVES DE LOGEMENT
SANS BUT LUCRATIF

Mrs. Jeffrey moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 14, An Act to amend the Co-operative Corporations Act and the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 in respect of non-profit housing co-operatives and to make consequential amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 14, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les sociétés coopératives et la Loi de 2006 sur la location à usage d'habitation en ce qui concerne les coopératives de logement sans but lucratif et apportant des modifications corrélatives à d'autres lois.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm pleased to recognize the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: This afternoon, I'm pleased to speak on the second reading of Bill 14, an amendment to the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006, and the Co-operative Co-operations Act. I'll be sharing my time with my parliamentary assistant, the member from Thunder Bay—Atikokan.

Our government understands the important role that co-operative housing providers play in providing affordable housing options for the people of Ontario. I want to begin this afternoon by making it clear why we believe that this legislation is needed.

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Under the Co-operative Corporations Act, co-ops currently have what can be characterized as a complex, costly and time-consuming process for terminating or ending occupancy agreements. This process is called the co-op tenure dispute resolution process. When it comes to co-op tenure disputes—for example, if a tenant doesn't pay their rent or they participate in illegal behaviour or they wilfully damage the property—the hard-working people who represent the interests of co-ops tell me the same thing: They all say that the current process for ending or terminating occupancy agreements in co-ops is too complicated. They say that the current process is inefficient for these non-profit housing providers and their members. They say that the current process is an approach that is too costly to a non-profit housing provider. And they say that they want our government to listen.

So we've been listening, and we've heard what they've had to say. In fact, this is an issue that's been important to our government for some time. Our government recognizes—and we appreciate—the dedicated and ongoing hard work of our co-operative housing federation. The federation is the main advocate in this province for not-for-profit co-op housing members and their boards. We share the federation's commitment to maintaining and promoting a strong co-operative housing sector, and the federation has gone on record to call our proposed legislation good public policy.

This bill, if passed, would make some long-needed changes to the Residential Tenancies Act and the Co-operative Corporations Act. The focus of our proposed legislation is to move most co-op tenure disputes from the courts to the Landlord and Tenant Board.

How would our proposed legislation improve the current process? Before I get to the details of how, I'd like to explain what the Landlord and Tenant Board currently does and why we believe this is the most appropriate place for disputes to be settled.

The Landlord and Tenant Board is the body established under the Residential Tenancies Act, or RTA, to resolve rental housing disputes. The board provides both tenants and landlords with timely access to specialized, expert, balanced and effective dispute resolution, and it is governed by principles we can all respect—ones of fairness, accessibility, customer focus and timeliness.

The Landlord and Tenant Board's offices are located in various locations around the province, and they provide convenient service when and where people need it. Under our proposed legislation, co-ops would, in the future, be able to apply to the Landlord and Tenant Board to resolve tenure disputes.

This is the first way that our bill proposes to change the Residential Tenancies Act and the Co-operative Corporations Act. However, this could only happen when the nature or type of the dispute is already covered under the Residential Tenancies Act. That's because the Co-operative Corporations Act provides a framework for housing co-ops to customize and create their own bylaws. The co-op's board of directors passes bylaws that are then confirmed by the members of that co-op at a general members' meeting.

While there are many common bylaws shared among housing co-ops, there are also some that are unique. The bylaws can include rules about communal duties, such as shoveling snow, or restrictions on pet ownership. These rules would not be affected by this bill. However, this bill would cover violations that are found in the Residential Tenancies Act, such as rent arrears, illegal behaviour or wilful damage to rental property. In these cases, co-op providers would have the option of applying for a hearing at the Landlord and Tenant Board.

The second way we propose the legislation would amend the Co-operative Corporations Act and the Residential Tenancies Act is to clarify that, when a dispute proceeds through either the courts or the Landlord and Tenant Board, it would be judged based on the merits of the case, not solely on whether the proper process was followed by the co-op board. Previously, the courts would look at whether or not a co-op's internal dispute-resolution process was respected in making their determination. This amendment would clarify that an eviction could not be overturned due to a minor procedural irregularity made by the co-op board. It would also clarify that an eviction could be overturned if it was found to be unjust, even if all the proper procedures of the co-op had been followed.

Another key amendment to the Co-operative Corporations Act would see the streamlining of the internal decision-making process of co-ops. It would clarify that decisions made by a co-op's board could be appealed to the co-op membership, although only if the co-op's bylaws expressly permit appeals.

These amendments would promote the transparency of all decisions.

These changes would ultimately save co-op providers and members considerable time, not to mention the cost of the service. To give you some context, today the average cost for co-ops to have a case heard in the courts is between \$3,000 and \$5,000. The time spent in court can also be lengthy due to adjournments and appeals. By comparison, an average eviction case heard by the Landlord and Tenant Board takes less than six months.

If passed, this legislation would result in lower legal fees for all parties due to shorter time frames and reduced complexity of the Landlord and Tenant Board.

Mr. Speaker, if passed, this legislation would also give co-op members and providers some of the same protections, benefits and responsibilities that are granted to landlords and tenants facing tenure disputes under the Residential Tenancies Act.

Using the Landlord and Tenant Board would give co-ops and their members access to mediation services to help them work out their differences. It would also give co-op members access to the Tenant Duty Counsel Program. This is a program that's funded by Legal Aid Ontario and delivered by the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario. This program provides low- and modest-income members with better and more affordable access to justice.

Our proposed legislation would offer co-op members involved in tenure disputes a process that is independent, transparent and affordable.

Finally, I would highlight that our proposed legislation would also permit the Landlord and Tenant Board to waive or defer fees for low-income individuals. The proposed power to waive fees would not be limited to applications related to co-op tenure disputes, but would also apply to all fees the Landlord and Tenant Board charges for landlord and tenant matters. This amendment would bring consistency to how these types of cases are treated at other tribunals and in the courts. For instance, a fee waiver program was implemented in Ontario courts in 2005, and similar provisions exist in the legislation of two other Ontario tribunals: the Ontario Municipal Board and the Assessment Review Board.

Advocates have argued that individuals and co-op members with limited means should not be denied access to the Landlord and Tenant Board if they can't afford to file an application, similar to other tribunals in Ontario. We agree. For instance, this could be a tenant whose only source of income is a disability benefit, whose landlord has not taken steps to restore heat to her apartment and who can't afford the \$45 fee.

The fee waivers can help individuals with very low income. It's for our vulnerable citizens who can't stretch their budgets any further.

The Landlord and Tenant Board intends to mirror other fee waiver programs in the province, where eligibility is based on monthly household income, or other sources of income such as social assistance or a disability pension.

The Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario, or ACTO, is well positioned to understand the need for fee waivers. As I just mentioned, it is a group that works to better the housing situation of Ontario residents who have low incomes by delivering the Tenant Duty Counsel Program.

This past Thursday, the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario came out in support of our proposed legislation. Tracy Heffernan, an ACTO staff lawyer, said, "Tenants living on low incomes have the same rights as other tenants, but the fees required by the Landlord and Tenant Board make it difficult for them to access justice." She went on to say that if this bill were passed, "Tenants with limited financial means will finally be sure their issues will be heard."

1400

Mr. Speaker, I hope that all members recognize the benefits of the proposed legislation. I hope that, in the spirit of partnership and our mutual goal to improve co-op housing in this province, they will support this important bill. I say this because the bill we're talking about today is about helping the people of Ontario, from all corners of the province.

Let me just give you some examples of the incredible co-ops found throughout Ontario. In Thunder Bay, Castlegreen Co-operative is home to about 400 residents. It is the first co-op in Thunder Bay and is really one of the first to operate in Canada. Castlegreen has a storied history. In the winter of 1975-76, when construction began, temperatures plunged to -40 centigrade and the snowfalls broke past records. Did that stop the dedicated group behind this project? Absolutely not. Despite the setbacks, the first members moved in during June of 1976.

Today, Castlegreen offers its members a whole host of services, including a community centre, a family garden plot, ice rinks, computer lab, bicycle and walking paths, and the Good Food Box program. Like so many other co-ops, it's committed to a community atmosphere of participation, fairness, integrity, diversity and environmental sustainability. It is member-owned and self-governed.

To the east, the Seaway Valley Co-op Organization operates a group of six housing co-operatives. Located in the Belleville, Kingston and Brockville area, these co-ops offer a wide range of housing options, including houses, apartments and townhomes of various sizes. This network of co-operatives has helped create housing solutions for people with different needs across the St. Lawrence-Lake Ontario corridor. This is an area where economic confidence remains fragile.

In the west, Mary Campbell Housing Co-operative in London proudly calls itself "a caring community." It's found in the downtown, in the heart, of London. The co-op is comprised of three buildings that are within walking distance of shops, a farmers' market, schools, theatre, restaurants, art galleries, parks, concert venues and libraries. Within its walls, it also features a children's playground, a community room with kitchen, storage, bicycle rooms and much more.

In my own community of Brampton, we have a number of housing co-ops, including Chegoggan. This is a 120-unit co-op building and is located in downtown Brampton, right next to our GO station and just around the corner from our new Rose Theatre. This building features a mix of units, including some that are subsidized and some that are wheelchair-accessible units, and others that are for tenants with intellectual disabilities. Built in 1992 with provincial assistance, approximately 25% of the residents living there today are original members, and most of those who have left have gone on to buy their own home.

These co-ops all have some traits in common. They create communal spaces and experiences for their members, they foster collaboration and community, and they focus on health and sustainability.

The list of amazing co-ops around this province goes on and on, but it's the residents of these co-ops that make such amazing places. The fact is that co-op housing helps us build communities we can all be proud of. That's because members who live in a co-op are the ones responsible for running the co-op. Co-op residents don't just live in a co-op. They help build the co-op community, a community where people live, work and play.

Mr. Speaker, co-op housing provides families across our province with secure and affordable housing. In fact, non-profit co-op housing has played a vital role in our affordable housing system for over 40 years. In Ontario, there are about 550 non-profit housing co-ops, and these co-ops provide affordable housing for 44,000 households, which represent about 125,000 Ontarians, including some of our most vulnerable citizens. The sector provides a home to families and individuals with a diverse range of backgrounds and incomes. It provides homes for medium- to low-income families, new immigrants, seniors, people with disabilities and members of the aboriginal community. The diversity and community focus of co-op housing is what makes it unique and strengthens this province.

Mr. Speaker, we know that co-ops come in very different shapes and sizes, ranging from collections of townhouses and small buildings with a handful of units to large, apartment-style buildings with hundreds of units like mine in Brampton. What sets co-ops apart from private rental housing is that they are democratic communities where the residents make the decisions on how the co-op operates. Members, the board and staff each have responsibilities to the co-op.

There are four main characteristics to co-op housing. The first is affordability. Housing co-ops are member-owned and -controlled organizations. For example, the monthly housing charges are set by the members to cover the costs of running the co-op.

The second characteristic is governance. Setting the overall direction of the co-op is the job of the directors and the members of the co-op. Co-ops are democratically run, and each member has a vote. Members elect the board of directors, and they approve the annual budget and set policy.

The third characteristic of a co-op is security of tenure. A member's right to live in the co-op is protected. Members can continue to live in a co-op as long as they follow the rules or bylaws of the co-op and pay their housing charge or rent on time.

The fourth characteristic of a co-op is community. Housing co-ops can also be strong communities where members actively participate in the business of the co-op. In addition to the standard tasks, such as approving the annual budget, members often volunteer with maintenance tasks—for example, lawn care—and are involved in other community-based projects such as producing a co-op newsletter.

Co-op housing and the people who live in these communities and work for those homes are very important to me, not just because I'm the Minister of Municipal

Affairs and Housing, but because I know that having a decent place to live is vital to good health, personal success, raising children and caring for parents, as well as leading a well-balanced life.

Decent housing is more than just shelter. It provides stability, security and dignity. It plays a central role in reducing poverty. It creates a strong base from which to find a job and contribute to strengthening the Ontario economy. Our proposed legislation would help support co-op providers and the individuals, families and children who call co-ops their home.

Mr. Speaker, our government plans to help the co-op housing sector remain strong. We want to see it continue to provide a viable choice for Ontario families. A housing sector that offers diversity for Ontario is not complete without a healthy co-op sector. Our government has made significant progress on our housing agenda. We're looking to make a real difference in the lives of working families and in the circumstances of Ontario's most vulnerable households.

Our government recognizes the role housing plays in supporting the growth and health of communities across Ontario. This is why we developed the Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy. It is the first of its kind in Ontario. A Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy sets a strong foundation for a more efficient, accessible system for those who need safe, affordable housing.

During our consultations, we heard that the existing housing system was too complicated and created obstacles for those in need. Those who deliver the housing programs told us that because of the system, they were unable to provide and develop the best possible services to those in need. Our strategy transformed the affordable housing system, and our strategy focused on four key pillars: first, putting people first; second, creating strong partnerships; third, supporting affordable options; and last, accountability.

The Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy provides municipalities and housing providers with greater flexibility to deliver housing services, recognizing that communities have different housing needs. The increased flexibility helps ensure that resources are allocated to meet local needs and improve outcomes for people. It helps make sure that services are accountable and on the right track.

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But I want to emphasize that affordable housing also fits into the new fiscal reality. As the former municipal budget chair in Brampton, I remember burning the midnight oil in an attempt to keep our costs down while at the same time delivering a service level that met my constituents' expectations. The one major need that I saw time and time again in my growing community and across Ontario was for safe and affordable housing. When people are in safe and affordable homes, communities thrive. People are healthier, physically and mentally, and our children do better in school.

Yes, affordable housing provides many benefits to our families, but it also benefits our economy. People with

secure housing are better prepared to enter the workforce. And those affordable housing projects help create jobs, mostly in the local community. So that's why, in the midst of fiscal constraints, we continue to invest in affordable housing.

Since 2003, the Ontario government has committed almost \$3 billion for affordable housing. Ontario is supporting the creation of over 17,000 affordable rental housing units, and making more than 263,000 repairs and improvements to existing units. We've made great strides recently. We've seen housing providers across this province successfully complete close to \$700 million in upgrading work under the Social Housing Renovation and Retrofit Program. Most of this work is now complete and ensures that the valuable social housing we have now endures for future generations.

In 2012, we achieved major milestones under the Investment in Affordable Housing program, or IAH, which is a four-year federal-provincial program of almost half a billion dollars. We've now committed more than \$200 million for this program, and we're seeing those results on the ground. During 2012, more than 600 households were no longer in need of affordable housing, such as in Aylmer, where two working-poor families are now housed in decent housing, or the Deseronto seniors now living in dignity and respect in a new building that is barrier-free and energy-efficient; and the more than 130 other households across this province receiving rent supplements to help them stay in their homes. And the work continues as I speak.

In the next few months, persons with disabilities from eight households will move into fully accessible homes in Woodstock under the IAH program. In Stratford, the performing arts lodge will open its doors to low-income seniors from the arts community next month. In the north, construction is under way for new seniors' housing in Thessalon in Algoma district, and a second one in the greater Sudbury area.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation is another step we're taking to support affordable housing across Ontario. We all know that having a place to call home is the first step out of poverty for low-income families and their children. Having a home is the first step in addressing many of the challenges that face Ontario families. Having a home is the first step to accessing greater opportunities in life. A home is the foundation from which people can build their lives so as to move from negative situations to better lives that contribute to a better tomorrow for all of us.

We all know that helping people have safe, affordable and healthy homes is a complex issue. There's no single quick fix. However, today's proposed legislation is one more step this government is taking to support the co-op housing sector.

Mr. Speaker, a healthy co-op housing sector helps to provide a variety of housing options for those most vulnerable in our society. This government plans to help the co-op housing sector remain strong so that it can continue to provide a viable choice for Ontario families. That's why we're taking action and we're proposing this legislation today.

I urge all members to support this bill once again. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. I'll recognize the member for Thunder Bay-Atikokan.

Mr. Bill Mauro: I'm pleased to be here to support the second reading of Bill 14, an amendment to the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006, and the Co-operative Corporations Act.

As the minister has explained, these important amendments have been designed to improve the way that the non-profit co-operative housing boards and their members resolve tenure disputes in Ontario. This legislation would, if passed, bring greater efficiency, accessibility and transparency to the co-op tenure dispute resolution process.

We know that the current process for terminating occupancy agreements for co-ops is complex, we know it's costly and we know it's time-consuming. The Co-operative Housing Federation has been a long-time advocate of legislation that would help decisions related to tenure disputes be fair both to co-ops and to their members.

As you have heard, the Co-operative Housing Federation represents housing co-ops throughout the province of Ontario. I want to repeat the minister's message that we share the federation's commitment to maintaining a strong co-operative housing sector. In our province, the federation's Ontario region promotes the successful operation of housing co-operatives by offering services, including education, to meet their clients' unique needs. The organization defends the interests of its members and works with regional federations to help co-ops build links with their municipal governments. It also promotes the growth of co-operative housing in Ontario. All of these are laudable goals.

Co-op housing has a long history in Canada. It goes back as far as the 1930s, when, among other co-operative initiatives, the Nova Scotia Antigonish Movement promoted co-ops that built homes for their members. When the construction of these homes was finished, the homes were sold to the members and the housing co-operatives were dissolved. There were building co-operatives similar to this formed in Quebec between the 1920s and the 1940s. The earliest student co-op in Canada was the Guelph Campus Co-op, which started up in 1913 as a retail co-operative and later went on to develop student housing and other services.

Organized lobbying began in the 1960s to gain government support for co-op housing. In 1968, the Co-operative Housing Foundation of Canada came into being. These were the early days of their advocacy for co-op housing. Today, we see that their work has results. From 1973 to 1992, the government helped finance thousands of co-operative housing units through three successive co-op housing programs. From the mid-1980s on, the three most populous provinces in Canada—Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia—also set up their own development programs to finance housing co-operatives.

It was at this time that the co-operative housing movement started to really develop. These new organizations worked with the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada to provide education, development and management services to an expanding number of Canadian housing co-ops. It is this long history that shapes the co-op housing movement today. Co-op housing has helped us build strong communities. Co-op housing helps support people from diverse backgrounds and provides an affordable option for many low-income Ontarians.

How is this done? It is done through the lower operating costs that housing co-ops frequently enjoy. This is partly because of the non-profit model, but it's also because of many benefits from the members' shared responsibilities and participation.

Who calls co-ops home? They're families, they're women, they're single parents, seniors, visible minorities, new immigrants, people of aboriginal ancestry and disabled persons. However, it is the values that underpin the entire co-op sector that truly help it stand apart. Co-ops are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity. Co-op members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others. These are values our government shares.

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Co-ops are also guided by universal principles which put their values into practice. First, co-ops are voluntary organizations, and they are open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without any form of discrimination.

Second, co-ops are democratically governed. Their members actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions on the principle of "one member, one vote." Elected representatives are accountable to the membership, much like we are to the voting public.

Third, co-op members contribute to and democratically control the capital of their co-operative. At least part of that capital is usually the common property of the co-operative. The co-operative surplus is either distributed to its members in proportion to their transactions with the co-op, or it's directed to other activities approved by the membership.

Fourth, co-ops are autonomous organizations controlled by their members. If they enter into agreements with other organizations, including governments, or raise capital from external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control by their members and maintain their co-operative autonomy.

Fifth, co-ops provide education and training for their members, for elected representatives, for managers and for employees. They also strive to inform the general public, particularly young people and opinion leaders, about the nature and benefits of co-operation.

Sixth, the co-operative movement works in solidarity with other co-ops, creating a strong bond of unity among members around the world.

Finally, co-ops work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members.

These principles, which co-op boards and their members live by every day, make them a unique and valuable part of our province's housing continuum.

Just as with other co-ops, co-op housing is member-governed. Many of those that help run co-operatives are volunteers. The people they serve are their neighbours and their friends. They are responsible for the decisions that affect these people's everyday lives.

The role of volunteers in today's modern society cannot be overestimated. They play a huge part in the running of our communities. These volunteers come from all walks of life, are of all ages, and they help run these co-ops. In fact, our government will soon be recognizing some of the incredible volunteers that enhance the lives of people living in Ontario. I'm sure volunteers from our co-op sector will be counted among them.

One of the most important features of co-ops is that they are also places that respect diversity. Here are some statistics from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp. from 2003 about Canadian co-ops; these are 2003 stats. Some 58% of members are women, 11% are members of visible minorities, 20% are immigrants, 4% are of aboriginal ancestry, and 12% of households include a person with a long-term physical disability requiring special features such as wheelchair access.

Important players like the Co-operative Housing Federation are finding more ways to encourage diversity in co-ops. For example, the Co-operative Housing Federation funds innovative diversity initiatives regionally, to help keep diversity issues a high priority for housing co-ops and federations.

Many co-ops are also participating in the federation's 2020 Vision program. This process is designed to help co-ops look clearly at their own community values, at their own quality of management, governance and their own environmental sustainability and, in the lens of this, to plan for their future.

Co-ops place special emphasis on engaging and empowering youth, while also finding ways to meaningfully involve seniors in their communities as well. It's this forward-thinking attitude and this inclusive and accepting environment that make co-ops exceptional.

As the minister has stated, the proposed legislation would amend the Residential Tenancies Act and the Co-operative Corporations Act to move most co-op tenure disputes from the courts to the Landlord and Tenant Board. This board is the body established under the Residential Tenancies Act, or the RTA, to resolve rental housing disputes.

I would like to build on some of what the minister already told you about the Landlord and Tenant Board. Under the RTA, the board has a dual mandate. First, the Landlord and Tenant Board exercises a quasi-judicial function by hearing and determining all questions of law and fact under the RTA. Second, the board is required to give information to landlords and tenants about their rights and about their obligations.

The board handles a large volume of cases due to the significant number of renters in Ontario, which represent

approximately 29% of Ontario's households. Annually, the board hears about 80,000 cases. Compare that to the estimated 350 co-op tenure disputes that are brought before the courts each year. The board strives to be efficient and deliver high-quality service to tenants and landlords, a point of pride and a point of distinction.

If passed, this legislation would mean that co-op providers and members would have most of the same protections, most of the same benefits and the same responsibilities afforded to landlords and tenants facing tenure disputes under the RTA. For example, co-op members facing eviction would now have the right to a hearing and have better access to affordable legal representation, such as paralegals and on-site duty counsel.

Both co-op providers and members would be able to seek mediated settlements. This means the provider and member could ask a mediator from the board, or outside of the board, to try to help them reach their own agreement. Mediators assist the parties in focusing on their interests so they can find potential solutions to satisfy those interests. This process can be more collaborative, more informal and can often feel more fair to the parties involved.

In all cases, tenure dispute resolution applications would be based on merit, giving co-op providers and members equal opportunity to present all the facts they believe are relevant to the board. Specifically, under the proposed legislation, co-ops would be able to seek resolutions to disputes through the Landlord and Tenant Board for such things as arrears, persistent late payment of rent or housing charges, illegal behaviour, interfering with reasonable enjoyment, and wilful damage.

These types of disputes are all currently grounds for eviction under the RTA. Tenure disputes based on grounds outside the RTA, however, would continue to be handled through the internal democratic co-op eviction process and the courts. For example, tenure disputes based on the following types of bylaws would continue to be resolved by the courts: violation of a no-pets provision; failure to fulfill a co-op member's duties, such as shovelling snow or cutting the lawn; and any other ground not provided for under the RTA.

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This process needs to be retained, because co-ops are governed democratically. Co-op members vote to establish their own bylaws that set out grounds for eviction that are not provided for under the RTA. The proposed legislation would also amend the Co-operative Corporations Act to streamline and improve the current internal eviction processes of non-profit co-op housing.

As the minister noted, there are many benefits to this proposed legislation. Streamlining the dispute resolution process mandated by the Co-operative Corporations Act would simplify the internal process and shorten the time required to resolve these disputes. Our proposed legislation, if passed, would use the expertise of the Landlord and Tenant Board and, in most cases, allow access to established infrastructure and procedures designed to deal with tenure disputes.

Current co-op law and policies regarding housing charges and other requirements of membership would remain the same, and the unique system of co-op housing would be recognized. Although co-op members would not have the right to make applications to the Landlord and Tenant Board, the rights of co-op members to use internal co-op processes and apply to the courts regarding co-op issues would be maintained. I would also mention that our proposed legislation would allow the Landlord and Tenant Board to waive or defer fees for low-income individuals.

This is a widely supported amendment that would bring consistency to how these types of cases are treated at other tribunals and in the courts.

When it comes to the safety of co-op members, bringing cases before the Landlord and Tenant Board may bring additional benefits to providers and to members. The RTA provides a fast-track eviction process under special circumstances, such as illegal drug activity or seriously impairing the safety of others. The fast-track provisions cut the eviction process time approximately in half, and include the following:

—Hearings at the Landlord and Tenant Board are scheduled more quickly;

—The eviction order must include a request that the sheriff speed up the enforcement of the eviction; and

—The board may order the tenant to be evicted immediately.

However, under the RTA, every tenant facing eviction has the right to a hearing at the board.

These rights have been put in place to protect both tenants and landlords and, if the legislation is passed, would be passed on to co-op providers and members as well.

The new approach would make the co-op tenure dispute process more responsive but also cost-effective. This last point really matters in today's fiscal climate, where every dollar counts, which is why we must work together to be innovative in our approaches and find ways to stretch the funds we have.

Co-ops have a history of stretching funds. They make very efficient use of their members' resources. By design, they are adapted to support low-income individuals and low-income families, many of which straddle the line of poverty.

Poverty, of course, is an issue of great importance to our government. December 2012 marked the fourth anniversary of our government's Poverty Reduction Strategy. Much has happened since December 4, 2008, the date our government announced its first five-year poverty reduction commitment. But especially in light of ongoing economic turmoil, much more needs to be done in order to meet the target. This government has focused its efforts primarily on children and families, but we have also taken steps to create opportunity for those most adversely affected by the economic downturn, and to build the economic and social foundations to achieve our poverty reduction goals.

From 2008 to 2009, the first year of the Poverty Reduction Strategy, 20,000 children moved out of poverty.

This means that over 4% fewer children were living in poverty. This December, we announced that this number has climbed to over 40,000. That's great news for Ontario families, Speaker.

We also have made other significant achievements. Over one million children in 530,000 families are being helped by the Ontario Child Benefit. Almost 122,000 kids are getting a stronger start in about 1,700 schools through full-day kindergarten. Nearly 33,000 children and young people, who may have otherwise gone untreated, are receiving free dental care through Healthy Smiles Ontario. An additional 13,000 young people are getting help finding jobs and opportunities through the Youth Action Plan. An estimated 20,000 more children and young people are getting faster and easier access to the right mental health supports, with 600 new mental health workers in schools, in our communities and in our courts.

We will continue to build on our momentum in the final year of the strategy while we consider future steps that we can take to break the cycle of poverty in our province.

Speaker, our government also recognizes the need for affordable housing and its role in supporting the growth and health of communities across Ontario. To support our Poverty Reduction Strategy, we developed the Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy. It sets a strong foundation for a more efficient, accessible system for those who need safe, affordable housing.

During our consultations on the Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy, we heard that the existing housing system was too complicated and created obstacles for those in need. Those who deliver the housing programs told us that because of the system, they were unable to develop the best possible services for those in need. The Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy provides municipalities and housing providers with greater flexibility to deliver housing services, recognizing that communities have different housing needs.

As the minister stated, affordable housing provides many benefits to families and to our economy. People with stable homes are better prepared to enter the workforce, and affordable housing projects create thousands of jobs, many of which are local.

Speaker, if history teaches us one thing, it is that we must work together to achieve better results. Our government has heard that there are frustrations with the current system. I want to assure the co-op housing sector that we are listening. We must be deliberate in our actions so that we can plan and invest in tomorrow. We have to work together. By strengthening the co-op housing sector, we are supporting affordable and secure housing for our families throughout Ontario.

This proposed legislation is just one more step to help strengthen the co-op housing sector so that it can continue to provide a viable choice for Ontario families. Together, we are making a real difference in the lives of working families and for Ontario's most vulnerable households. This new process would be a win-win-win

for co-op housing providers, for their members and for the justice system.

I urge all members to support this important piece of legislation to help support co-ops and their members.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jim McDonell: It's with interest that we listen to the bill that has been re-submitted. We supported the bill in the last session and are interested to see some of the changes they've brought forth.

I had a chance to meet with some residents of my riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry who operate a co-operative and needed or are requesting some changes, so it's good to see some of these amendments coming through. It will be interesting to get it to committee. It will give us an opportunity to make some changes. They provide an important spot in Ontario. I'm sure my own riding and many ridings like my own have hundreds of people waiting for affordable housing, and this is really part of the solution.

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My first occasion to be associated with co-operative housing was at Queen's University. Science '44 started a co-operative in 1944, which I believe is still operating today, that provided an alternative for students that allowed them to find a place to live at a reduced rate and looked after their needs. A friend of mine stayed there, and they had to provide cooking or cleanup services as part of their rent. It worked very well, and just goes to show that there are many places or many opportunities for this type of service throughout the province, and it's something we should be promoting.

Again, my residents on Brookdale Avenue in Cornwall were looking for tweaks to the system that would make a very affordable solution even more affordable. So we look forward to seeing this bill in committee, and we're looking forward to improving it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Prue: I stand to comment on the comments by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and her parliamentary assistant, the member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan.

I listened intently to what they had to say, because co-operative housing has a very dear spot in my heart. The very best apartment buildings in all of Beaches–East York are co-ops. One only has to go to Dawes Road, one only has to go to Rexleigh or Glenburn or to where they exist and look at the nicest apartments. You know, before you even walk in the door, that they are co-ops. Would that other people who are in rental units had the good fortune to live in a co-op.

I'm here today to ask the government to please move on this, because not only is this coming back from the last Parliament; it's coming back twice. The first time, it came forward as a private member's bill from the member for Etobicoke Centre. She put it in as a private member's bill and, of course, the government prorogued the Legislature. The next time it came back, it was a gov-

ernment bill, and the government prorogued the Legislature. Now we have it for a third time. Please, please act on this before you prorogue the Legislature for the next election, because these poor people have been waiting a long, long time.

We're back today, and I'm suggesting that what we need to do is make this very quickly. We need to give it unanimous approval. We need to fast-track it. We need to make sure it happens quickly. We don't need to listen to a whole bunch of long, bureaucratic speeches, where everybody reads the paper and does it by rote, because that's what I've heard so far. What we need to do is send it to committee. We need the co-op bill to pass. We need the legislation to go, and we need to make it happen before the government, in its wisdom, prorogues again.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Phil McNeely: It's good to hear that type of comment from the third party and from the opposition.

I haven't that much experience with co-op housing in Ottawa–Orléans, but the experiences we've had have all been good, except for the one issue of someone who's breaking the rules in many ways. How do you get them out?

The bill amends the Co-operative Corporations Act and the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006. Most of the amendments are for the purpose of creating a procedure in the Residential Tenancies Act for non-profit housing co-operatives to regain possession of a member's unit occupied by a person after his or her membership and occupancy rights in the co-operative terminate or expire—this is the only case I saw in Ottawa–Orléans.

Otherwise, this is an excellent mechanism for providing affordable housing. This will allow for the settlement of tenure disputes—resolution for co-op residents in a much more efficient, cost-effective and transparent manner—and keeps the people out of the courts. It does the right thing.

I think there's been support by all parties for co-operative housing. With our housing needs, we know this is one way you can get costs down. So this bill should be—I would agree with the member from the third party. We don't have to talk about it; we can move it forward quickly. Certainly, if that's what the Legislature wished to do, I'm sure everyone would be happy to see it go through to committee quickly.

Thank you very much. It's a good bill. We should all support it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Walker: Again, we're pleased to see this bill come back yet again. I'm told that this was announced in 2007. I'm certainly hopeful that the Liberals, who have committed to balancing the budget by 2017–18, are going to be able to deliver on that pledge better than they have on this one.

Similar to my colleague from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, we have issues with co-ops in our riding. I want to just suggest again that the Ontario PCs

supported this bill when it was introduced last year by the then Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Minister Kathleen Wynne. However, it fell victim to Dalton McGuinty's prorogation. It should already be law. It has cost co-op members potentially hundreds of thousands of dollars in delays and unnecessary court costs.

We generally support it. We want to see these types of things get out of the courts so that other, more pressing issues can be there and there is an alternative. But it has to always be done with balance. It needs to be a fair and balanced process for both sides, the landlords and the tenants, and it needs to ensure that there's no frivolous or nuisance stuff being able to be actually backlogged—even backlogged more, because one of the challenges right now is that half of these things never get heard. There's never an opportunity for it to move forward. So we need to ensure that that is the case.

From our PC side, we'll generally be supporting, but we will be pushing for province-wide hearings on the amendments to this Landlord and Tenant Board so each side can be heard, so the bill is balanced and effective, as all legislation should be.

We can't have more legislation for the sake of legislation, which this government of the last eight years continues to do. They bring things to the House that actually slow the system down rather than moving forward.

I'm pleased to hear the member from Orléans say that they want to just get on with it; they want to not have so much talk and debate all the time. That would be good for a change, because in many cases, I think we spend way too much time debating frivolous and meaningless stuff when we could be getting action to the floor that's actually going to help the people who are most in need.

These co-ops need this support. We are generally supportive, but there are some challenges that we want to have hammered out in the amendments portion to this before it's legislated. Thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Response?
The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank the member from Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry for his positive comments and his encouragement; the member for Beaches—East York for his passion and his enthusiasm, as usual; the member from Ottawa—Orléans for his comments; and the member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound for his genuine support for a fair and balanced process. I do appreciate the common thread of comments that are coming forward today.

I also want to thank the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario, the co-op housing federation—Harvey, thank you so much—and the federation of rental housing of Ontario for their ongoing input. This has been a long process, and I think we've had lots of conversations.

Many of us have experience with co-ops in our neighbourhoods, and they usually run so well that most of the time nobody would even notice that they were a different kind of housing provider. But if you have one in your neighbourhood and you have the good fortune to go in and see how well they're run, I think you can see—I

know in my own riding of Brampton, there are two co-ops, that I've known for decades, that run so well. They're great communities. They support a lot of the vulnerable populations that tend to gravitate to a co-op housing form of tenure, and I think they're a great support. They're an asset to Ontario, and we want to make sure that they're strong.

We've heard that this type of amendment, this proposed legislation, would assist them in managing some of those issues that are timely, are expensive and don't provide accountability. We think that we've found the right balance.

I certainly have heard from members of both parties that they're interested in working with us, and I appreciate their thoughtful consideration of this piece of legislation. Certainly, we want to work with them. We think that there's a lot to be gained by bringing this legislation forward. I appreciate their advice, and I'm encouraged by all their support. Thank you so much.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Steve Clark: It's a pleasure for me, as the official opposition municipal affairs and housing critic, to rise on behalf of our caucus to speak to Bill 14, An Act to amend the Co-operative Corporations Act and the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 in respect of non-profit housing co-operatives and to make consequential amendments to other Acts. I just wanted to make sure I read the bill in its entirety, because I know we tend to shorten it, just to talk about the co-operatives statute law amendment act.

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I have to say that I am generally supportive of the bill, as I was on its previous incarnation in the Legislature, but I do have to express—and I know that I've quietly expressed it to the minister—that there is one new aspect of this legislation that the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing has added into this bill. I'm not particularly sure why the minister has chosen this bill or this issue, especially because of the protracted history that this particular issue has had in a number of incarnations of legislation. I'm very hopeful that the minister is going to acknowledge this and fix her mistake so that we can move forward with the substantive issues and aspects of Bill 14, which I've said before has had the general support of all three parties when it has previously been brought forward.

I recall standing here at second reading of the previous bill—for the debate of Bill 65—and I can remember getting a discussion about why the legislation was so important: the fact that we wanted to change and resolve co-op disputes that I think are very long and exasperating aspects, the way they're presently set up to go through the courts.

Before I start and get too far into it, I do want to take a moment to acknowledge the guests that are here today from the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada. I think every one of the members of provincial Parliament can certainly say that these folks are no strangers to the Legislative Assembly. I know that we all look forward to

their visits and to raise the important issues of their housing. Ladies and gentlemen that are here today, I think we all should welcome this afternoon Dale Reagan, the managing director; Harvey Cooper, the manager of government relations; Diane Miles, manager of co-op services; and Judy Shaw, program manager of co-op services for the federation. They're in the west members' gallery.

Applause.

Mr. Steve Clark: I want to thank them not just for being here today and for accepting our thunderous applause, but also for the work that they've done, not just with this piece of legislation, but the other two pieces of legislation that were before us. I think we can all agree in this House that they've suffered too many setbacks along the way in those three different versions of this bill, so I want to commend them for their advocacy in demonstrating to members of provincial Parliament like myself why the bill, in its most base form, is the right thing to do, and also for their perseverance in the face of so many disappointments that they've had before. I know the last bill especially was a particular disappointment because, as I said before, legislation to change this process is long overdue and it's something that the government opposite promised back—since 2007. As I stated, this is your third kick at the can, and I know that you're very interested that it would be the last kick that you would have for this bill.

I'm going to take an opportunity to talk about the whole issue of co-ops, especially since I took on the role as municipal affairs and housing critic for the official opposition to meet with co-operative housing advocates. At that reception that we had just after the House prorogued back in October—I stayed after the House prorogued; I wanted to make sure I was at that reception—I met a number of people from all over the province that were involved in co-ops. I remember a constituent of Ms. McKenna, the member for Burlington, who approached me and asked if I would be interested in coming to Burlington to visit one of their co-ops.

I wanted to say that I had a great trip back on November 6 with the member for Nipissing. Mr. Fedeli and I, along with my intern at the time from the OLIP program, the Ontario Legislature Internship Programme—she was with me for the fall term, Gillian Hanson; she's now with the member for Oak Ridges-Markham. Gillian, along with Mr. Fedeli and I, visited Ms. McKenna's riding in Burlington and we had a great tour of Stoa Co-operative Homes, which is located on Brock Street in Burlington: a great facility. Of the two co-ops in my riding, neither one of them is a high-rise co-op, so it was a great opportunity for me to tour a facility that I wasn't familiar with. We met with the co-op manager. It was actually not a bad day, so we did go outside and tour the outdoors, we toured a couple of the units, and then we had a great round table with some of the residents at Stoa. This is a long-standing co-op in the city of Burlington, and I want to thank Ms. McKenna, the member for Burlington, for being my tour guide that day

and hosting Mr. Fedeli and I at Stoa. I have to say—and I know that the folks from the federation are here—it was just a great tour, a great opportunity to exchange ideas, to see different unit styles, to see the way that the co-op is managed. It was really one of the highlights that I had over that month after we prorogued. So I want to thank them for opening up Stoa and being our hosts that day.

So both in that tour and also in my own riding—with my municipal background, I am certainly familiar with co-op housing. I understand clearly that what Bill 14 proposes is to finally bring the changes that so many co-ops, whether it be ones like Stoa or newer ones, have looked for. And frankly, it's been a long journey. I'm somewhat puzzled as to why that was the case, that we were unable to agree and move forward at an early point within the Legislature, especially when I knew—and based on the debate that we had on the bill the way it was structured—that there was so much common ground that we had between the three parties. It's failure on matters like this issue that I think frustrates members of this Legislature, and also frustrates our constituents—that we can't, even on the simplest of legislative changes, have co-operation that would move something forward. I know that my constituents have expressed quite a lot of frustration in the way that this government has been dealing with their business and this whole issue around the fact that we prorogued three days before even that reception, when we were right down to the short strokes in terms of being able to get that bill passed.

The other issue that I think is important is that we have a problem that costs co-op members a million dollars in unnecessary legal costs every year. So it costs them a million dollars, but we also clog up the court system, which costs all Ontarians time and money. Yet on and on this goes; the millions add up and the court dockets just get more backlogged. In this case, the government agrees that there's a problem, agrees to the solution, but then drags its feet the last two times in getting that decision made.

You know, unchecked again, this is just another opportunity that the government has lost to get its fiscal house in order and to get that dollar figure put back into co-ops, as opposed to being tied up in court cases. If this was the private sector and a company had millions of dollars bleeding from it every year, year after year, when they knew what the solution was—somebody would be fired and terminated in the private sector if an issue like this was still in effect. You know what, Speaker? Perhaps Ontarians will get their wish and perhaps there will be some pink slips being given to those across the floor if their inability to manage this province continues.

The failure of this government is pretty plain—that every man, woman and child in this province is saddled with nearly \$18,000 worth of debt. That's our share of the provincial debt that is on track, as many speakers on this side of the House have said, to reach \$411 billion. So it's of concern, and I think that when we have a solution to a problem, we need to be able to deal with it. Certainly, the spirit of this bill is something that the government has promised for five years.

1500

The member for Beaches–East York mentioned earlier the private member's bill that the member for Etobicoke Centre brought forward, Bill 198, which was introduced and died on the order paper. Of course, we also have had a number of speakers this afternoon mention Bill 65, which died just last year.

Again, I think that anyone who's following this issue can look back to last fall, just before the House broke. I want to bring members' attention, particularly the Minister of Municipal Affairs, Minister Jeffrey, to the fall 2012 newsletter, which I just happen to have here, of the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada. I'm sure that the minister and perhaps her parliamentary assistant have read it, so she should know that there was a lot of talk last year about Bill 65 and the spirit of co-operation that existed, and the fact that right after it was introduced, all three parties rallied around until, we all know, former Premier McGuinty prorogued the Legislature. Apparently, he had more pressing issues that he felt he should be dealing with rather than Bill 65, something about a couple of gas plants being cancelled at a cost of \$1.3 billion and a contempt motion, if my memory serves me correctly.

Now we know that individual as the member for Ottawa South, who pulled the plug on the Legislature back in the fall. As we all know, Bill 65—and another 100 bills, I might add—died on the order paper. So it's important that we look back to what this Legislature was talking about in terms of Bill 65, and I think it's important as well that we look to the newsletter that is circulating. I'm going to quote from the newsletter. It's under the title, "Eviction Bill Dies on Order Paper":

"After very promising progress and building excitement, Bill 65 died on the order paper, along with all other legislation, when the Premier resigned and prorogued the Legislature. The bill would have brought in the long-awaited changes to the eviction system for Ontario housing co-ops.

"When the Premier made his announcement on October 15, the bill was in the middle of second reading debate, which was expected to wrap up later that week. This would have marked an important milestone and brought the legislation close to final approval.

"This is incredibly disappointing news for us, especially when the government had given our legislation priority and it was moving forward," says Harvey Cooper, manager of government relations for CHF Canada's Ontario region.

"The only good news in this is that the minister and opposition housing critics still support the legislation as good public policy and have vowed to do their best to bring it back whenever the Legislature reconvenes," said Cooper.

"The Ontario region's work to win all-party support for the bill has won praise from political observers. Graham Murray, writing in Inside Queen's Park, a respected publication that covers the Ontario political scene, wrote that, 'Whatever the elixir used to win tri-

partisan backing for legislation the Co-op Housing Federation has been pushing, they ought to put a flask of it in the loot-bags that will be given to MPPs as they leave the sector's Queen's Park [Co-op] Housing Day on October 17.'

"Cooper noted the region will continue to promote the legislation to all three parties while the Legislature is prorogued and will push them to reintroduce the legislation as soon as possible when the Legislature is recalled.

"Never underestimate the resiliency of the co-operative housing movement," says Cooper."

I wanted to read that into the record, because I think that was very important, especially what Mr. Murray said about the fact that there had been this bill that created this elixir of co-operation. I suggest that perhaps the recipe may not have been duplicated perfectly in this particular bill.

The other thing is, you can see the co-operation—I'm sorry, Speaker; I'm going to ask for your indulgence. You could see, if you had this in your hand, the wonderful picture of everyone smiling. I'll let everyone know who is in this picture; obviously, we're all smiles. You've got some of the folks who are up in the gallery, but you've also got myself; the member for Welland, who is the third party's housing critic; and you also have the former Minister of Municipal Affairs, who is now the Premier.

So we're all smiles. I guess she would have been a candidate—well, no; she was still the minister then.

Interjection: The musical minister.

Mr. Steve Clark: Yes, exactly.

So you've got this beautiful picture of everyone very pleased with a straightforward piece of legislation. But now you've got a surprise. You've got this new bill; the Minister of Municipal Affairs has added something to this mix of co-operation. Somehow, none of the housing advocates who I've spoken with in the past—certainly not the folks from CHF—have ever mentioned this issue that is in the bill. You see, Speaker, in addition to doing all the right things to streamline the resolution process for co-ops, Bill 14 proposes to give the Landlord and Tenant Board the power to waive the \$45 filing fee for low-income tenants.

To me, there's no rhyme nor reason for it other than, I believe, to play politics. The minister can claim that she simply wanted to take advantage of this opportunity to add something by opening up the Residential Tenancies Act to make not just substantive changes to co-ops, but this other opportunity; I don't buy that for a second. I'll get to my reasons for being somewhat surprised with this change in a few moments.

By including this unnecessary and, I suggest, completely unrelated amendment to Bill 14, the minister has taken a magical, non-partisan elixir that Graham Murray talked about and put it into a poison chalice. That's what's happened. We've had all of this co-operation for Bill 65, and now something has changed, and I can't for the life of me understand why she's done that. I would love to have someone across the way in the government

explain to me why it's been done. I would feel if I was part of the federation that, somehow, this bill was a bit hijacked from the one that we all stood here last fall and talked about as a co-operative bill.

Clearly to me, it really hits the nail on the head with the Premier's empty rhetoric on co-operating. I remember quite well, as I think we all do, the very glowing headlines when the new Premier was minted at her convention, and also in the throne speech. In case members of the Legislature or perhaps people viewing at home have forgotten, given what they've seen from this government in the last few weeks, I'm going to remind them of some of the headlines that we saw when the Premier took office and pledged co-operation with the opposition parties.

Globe and Mail, February 18: "Wynne Aims at Tripartisan Peace with Nods to Tories and NDP"; Bloomberg.com, February 19: "Ontario Premier Wynne Pledges Budget Balance and Co-operation"; Ottawa Citizen, February 19: "Wynne Offers Olive Branch, Says Focus Should Be on Jobs and Economy"; Toronto Star, February 19: "Wynne Appeals for 'Common Ground' in Conciliatory Throne Speech"; Hamilton Spectator, February 19: "Premier Kathleen Wynne is heralding a new era of co-operation at Queen's Park"; Windsor Star, February 19: "Wynne Pledges Co-operation in Ontario Government."

Speaker, the list goes on and on, and on it goes. I think the ink was barely dry on those headlines when the Premier's action betrayed her nice words. This is supposed to be the new era of co-operation and working across party lines. How does she allow this particular amendment that I spoke of earlier to make its way into this bill, at the very essence of the co-operation that she's talked about? The answer, of course, Speaker, is that the Premier can talk the talk, but in terms of this bill she's not walking the walk.

1510

There's been no new approach to governing, and it's been obvious by what's happened since the throne speech in the last two weeks—it's clear to me that we continue to battle the government on issues around the gas plants. We can't seem to have the co-operation. The tactics and the approach that we've seen with this bill, to have an addition that comes out of the blue, is the same that was done by this government back in October when the former Premier pulled the plug on this House.

Then we have a bill like this one. That the minister would add this unnecessary amendment to legislation that we all have agreed on shows that—it's an attitude of co-operation. We've had this attitude of co-operation with this particular bill, and now we get an amendment right out of the blue.

If you look at what happened last year, after the 2011 election, with Premier McGuinty using the words "major minority"—this bill would be more like—a party that would be governing with a majority would stick in an amendment like this that's totally unrelated to an all-party-supported concept. It's not something that you

would see from a government that's in a minority position, especially when you have a Premier who keeps talking about co-operation.

The mismanagement we've seen in this House over the last almost 10 years—again, it's a failed opportunity that the government has put forward with the opposition parties, and now we have Bill 14 with this amendment to make a significant and, I've stressed, totally unrelated change to the Landlord and Tenant Board. I can't understand why we would have such change brought forward at this time.

So let's look at the amendment that's going to authorize the Landlord and Tenant Board to waive the \$45 filing fee for low-income tenants. We all know the board can be quite a frustrating experience for both tenants and landlords alike because it takes so long for them to render a decision.

In its February 2011 report Justice Denied: Ontario's Broken Rent Dispute Process, the Federation of Rental Housing Providers of Ontario had some interesting things to say about the Landlord and Tenant Board. Here are a few of the highlights:

"Ontario's rent dispute process is broken.... The rent dispute process in Ontario is excessively long, and is unjust to landlords"—this is from that organization. "It typically takes 90 days in Ontario for a dispute to be finally resolved, and costs the landlord about \$5,200, not including administrative costs, lost time and productivity."

That report continues, Speaker: "That's only the typical process. If a 'professional tenant' is involved, he or she uses requests for internal board reviews and appeals to the Superior Court to add even more delays; these tenants easily use Ontario's system to bilk landlords of up to one year's rent, suffer no consequences, and cause severe financial and emotional distress for landlords."

I have to ask the minister what she thinks will happen by introducing a new process proposed in Bill 14 into the system. I think we're going to see complaints increased at the Landlord and Tenant Board. I think, again, it's horrendously backlogged to begin with and we're going to suffer from some even further delays because of that. Not only is the process going to be bogged down by the sheer volume of complaints, but I think we need to take the time to review all of those applicants for a fee waiver. Again, no one, whether you're a landlord or a tenant, wants to wait longer for a decision. I can understand that \$45 to some tenants is going to be a big deal; it's going to be groceries, a contribution to a utility bill. It's a big deal. and I am very sympathetic. But I worry about whether the fee and this whole process will see, perhaps, nuisance applications from both sides being put forward. I just want to make sure, Speaker, that no matter whether you're a tenant or a landlord, the system would work for you.

My understanding is that typically the fee would be returned to the tenant if they were successful at the board.

If we're going to take these disputes and increase them, someone has to pay in the end. Certainly I'm very

concerned that at the board right now there is not a reasonable period of time for disputes to be put forward. That has been my concern right from the start. I've had tenants in my riding complain; I've had landlords in my riding complain. It's technically a uniform complaint that they've had: Sometimes it's just unmanageable in terms of the delays. So I don't want it to take longer; I don't want it to be a barrier.

I do think there are a number of changes that constituents have said to me should be considered as part of a review of the landlord-tenant process. I think that simply waiving the fee doesn't make the cost to operate that board go away, and I think we need to get to the root of a responsible way to deal with the board. Listening to some of my landlords—and I'm going to get into some of the landlords and some of the other issues that people have brought forward to our members in a few moments.

I'm very concerned that—again, the fact that we sat here on two other occasions, had general consent that we were going to move forward in a co-operative way and then an amendment comes out of the blue, is very distressing. I think that's something we need to deal with in the future. Even in my briefing with ministry staff last week, at no time did they give me any groups they have consulted. They have given me no background on where this particular change was put forward.

I think we've seen them doing this before. Premier Wynne, when she was Minister of Municipal Affairs, brought forward another bill that she heralded would be a godsend to the housing market, which was dealing with rent increase guidelines. The government at the time heralded that piece of legislation—it was Bill 19—as a cornerstone of its plan for affordable housing and affordable increases for tenants in the province.

I said from the start of that debate that I was worried the government was playing politics too much, and I think I was right. Because when you look at what has happened since that bill was passed, you see that nothing really significant was dealt with. When the numbers were crunched on that particular bill, the savings amounted to 0.1%. It worked out to about a loonie a month for the average rental household. I don't think that's substantive reform in our housing policy in the province of Ontario.

A buck a month, to me, isn't something that groups were looking for; they were looking for more reform, more discussion, more co-operation between the three parties. It's nonsense to suggest that to have an amendment that would just deal with waiving a fee would make anyone in this Legislature be called anti-tenant. I think it's bad news for tenants. Any way to delay a valid complaint by a tenant or by a landlord—they shouldn't be delayed in any way, shape or form.

I've got to point out that my briefing with ministry staff last week was very interesting. I have to say—and I don't know whether it's because the government hasn't got their legislative agenda. I know the House leader is here. He may want to provide a comment to me about the way they handle bills being introduced. This bill, with its appendices, is probably about 40 pages. The briefing you

get—it was just before the Ontario Good Roads Association conference—was pretty sparse. There are seven pages; there wasn't much detail given.

When I look at the whole approach, it reminds me of one of my former jobs. I worked in the newspaper business for a number of years. The ministry's approach to briefing reminded me of a term that editors use with reporters, and the term is "burying the lead." I know none of the reporters at Queen's Park would do any of that in their articles; they're far too experienced for doing that. But when it happens, sometimes you almost have to read right to the very end of the report or story to really come up with the real news. I think that was the case with this briefing: In a very small section at the very end, they decided to pop in a totally unrelated aspect to this particular bill.

1520

I think the legislation that we had on the books just prior to proroguing the House was something that all three parties liked. There was not a particular issue. So right in the middle of the ROMA/OGRA conference—I've got to laugh at the way these briefings work. I'm the municipal affairs critic, and you've got the biggest municipal conference in the province here. I'm basically there, as is the critic for the third party and most of the ministers here—you're at the conference day and night, meeting with delegates, in the government's case, sort of every 15 minutes. We meet with them about every 25 minutes; I'm sure the third party's about the same. So I've got to squeeze a briefing in at 8 o'clock in the morning—

Interjections.

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm not asking for anybody's sympathy, but what I'm trying to get to is that you've got this arsenal of folks across the table from you, you've got quite a bit of salary across the table looking at you, and you've got a pretty sparse-looking brief that, all in maybe one page, really tells the whole story. So you've got 41 pages; you've got seven pages—it's not much of a briefing, I have to tell you. For them to read through seven pages of a slide deck is not much of a briefing, not much of a communication, not much co-operation. I'm not going to read the headlines that the Premier had in all the papers when she took office, but it's not that spirit of co-operation that we had with Bill 65. It just wasn't there.

I wanted to mention it because I think it's important when we have a critic portfolio that we do reach out to stakeholders. I know many of them that I spoke to after this bill was introduced and after the briefing were surprised at the way that this was put forward. I do hear from landlords and tenants in my riding and from my caucus colleagues all the time about the particular process. When you do make a change to the Landlord and Tenant Board, it puts up a flag in my mind that if you're going to make some changes, you should review some of the other changes.

I think it's very interesting that the parliamentary assistant is from Thunder Bay, because I've got a letter, an email that I received just after New Year's, from a

gentleman named Derek, a landlord in Thunder Bay. I want to read it because it's very heartfelt. It's basically a call to action that he's giving us. I could really sense his frustration in the e-mail.

The subject line said, "Will my email to you change anything? Does government work?"

It says,

"Dear MPP,

"Every day I am being robbed. The police can't do anything.

"I know you are busy. I know there is currently a leadership race on. So, I will keep this short and hope it reaches you!

"I am a landlord in Thunder Bay. I know I do not live in your constituency. Believe me though when I say, many, many landlords do! You know this as you know many tenants live in your area too. Please consider taking up this issue and get the appreciation and respect from your own constituents for doing so!

"This is an important issue that has serious ramifications for all tenants and landlords in Ontario. It is changing the Landlord and Tenant Board process for evictions.

"Right now, every day I am having money robbed from me. I have three non-paying tenants that have all decided not to pay rent. They live in different units in the same building. I can only hope they have not teamed up to not pay rent. I look after and upgrade my buildings—this is not the issue.

"How do you think it feels to watch my savings being stolen from me?

"I worked during the summer in university to save money for being in the army reserve. I then went to Afghanistan to support my country. I didn't drink and smoke my money away. I saved it. Now I watch my tenants doing what I didn't do as they smoke and drink and throw their bottles on the lawn. I then also pay for the bottles to be picked up or I'll get fined by the city.

"The problem is they are refusing to pay rent, and every day I am paying for them to have a roof, water and heat. I will likely never see a dime from them. Some of them are on ODSP and OW; where will they get money to pay for the lost months?

"I can't believe with all the petitioning and lobbying that this issue has not been addressed. Other provinces evict tenants in 15 to 25 days; Ontario: three to four months. If they don't pay in a month, why would they pay in the long term (especially when they can get away with not paying at all)?

"If a department store clerk saw someone stealing, they would get security and the police would be called. I can't do anything but watch as more and more is stolen from me. There is little or no recourse to get any money after they were finally evicted.

"How is this fair?

"What will you do?

"Read the article by the FRPO to see a win-win solution for tenants and landlords. Other articles are attached,

for example, of one of dozens and dozens of tenants (just ask any property manager) that manipulate the system.

"I wonder what will change based on this email? This issue has left me disillusioned by my government. If for years nothing has changed will it now? Will the unfairness stop? If the government does nothing, what do I need to do to change this; what can I do? I will not be helpless as I watch my savings disappear and I go into debt to support non-paying tenants for months on end.

"I agree to be governed by a government that is fair and looks after the needs of the people creating laws that are balanced and fair.

"The current landlord and tenant laws and acts are not fair. I realize you are not government that made these laws. You are the government that can make them fair, though."

I know that some may disagree with some of the contents of that letter, but I'm sure we can all pull letters from both landlords and tenants that talk about their frustration with the system.

The member for Cambridge, when I toured his riding, had a number of landlords that wanted to speak to me on an unrelated issue about waterways. The lady's name was Kayla Andrade, who's got a crusade going on on the Ontario Municipal Act where there are 80 landlords, some representing associations in Hamilton, Kitchener-Waterloo, Brant county and the London area. They had a meeting at the Galt branch of the Royal Canadian Legion in support of her bid to axe legislation which makes landlords responsible for the unpaid utility bills of their delinquent tenants. There were people there from West Elgin near St. Thomas, Scarborough and Peterborough. They were coming that far, going to a meeting in Galt.

This is something that I became aware of when I was a chief administrative officer, the fact that water rates are dealt with only by the owners of the building and not by the individual tenants, and that the municipality, if they were going to collect that unpaid water charge, would have to go after the landlord because of the way the Municipal Act is written.

I appreciate the fact that the member for Cambridge has got a petition from Kayla Andrade. I know she's got a website and a bit of a campaign at landlordrescue.ca. So I encourage people to look at what she's proposing.

Again, it's another issue that landlords and tenants are bringing forward to our caucus. They're doing so on the basis that they won't have, or they didn't think they had, an opportunity to open up the Residential Tenancies Act, and I'm suggesting that if the government is serious about this little amendment on the \$45 fee, we should be fair. We should commit to finding out what landlords like Derek in Thunder Bay and tenants across the province have to say about it.

Now, when this bill gets into committee, perhaps we should commit, because of this amendment, to travel across the province to talk about the Landlord and Tenant Board and the Residential Tenancies Act. Maybe we should go on the road and find out tenant issues and landlord issues, to find out whether the only change

should be for the government to waive the filing fee for some tenants or to look at perhaps streamlining the system for every tenant and every landlord in the province.

1530

There's even a model of consultation we can follow, because the government itself used it in the past. Back in 2006, before the RTA was brought in, the McGuinty government undertook what it described as an "unprecedented" amount of engagement with stakeholders. They boasted about travelling to 10 different communities to hear from landlords and tenants. They were in Toronto, Kitchener, London, Ottawa, Thunder Bay, Sudbury, Kingston and Hamilton. They had 5,000 questionnaires completed, 1,200 telephone inquiries, 250 written submissions and meetings attended by over 1,500 people.

Why don't we just do that again? After all, we've got the RTA opened up for Bill 14, and the government is eager to make an amendment to the Landlord and Tenant Board, so why don't we try to take the pulse of the rental-housing sector in the province right now? I bet that if we did, the feedback we'd get in 2013 would far surpass what the government heard seven years ago. I know that there are many tenants and landlords back home in Leeds-Grenville who would be prepared to come to one of those sessions and tell me what's on their minds, because I've met with them.

Landlords, for example—I'll give you two examples: Ted Carr and Mike Gordon, both of whom I've mentioned in this House during debate of other legislation. I've had more like them come forward and talk about their frustrating experiences at the board and how difficult it is to collect back rent and to evict bad tenants. I hear the sense of frustration in their voices and I know that some of them are just considering getting out of the rental business altogether. I'm afraid we're chasing good people out of the system.

Using Ted Carr as an example: He's been a great landlord in the Brockville area for a number of years. He's always tried to accommodate people. I've met with him extensively about what he's been able to do to help those less fortunate. I think he knows that, as a landlord, it's a lot easier to resolve your dispute with your tenant before you get to the Landlord and Tenant Board—that only makes good policy—because he doesn't want to have an empty unit at the end of the day, and he'd rather have some co-operation.

During the debate last year, I mentioned that Ted wrote to me about his perspective as a small landlord, and I think it's worth reading into the record again today. Ted writes, "I have, and continue to have, money outstanding from a tenant, this after many requests for payment, different hearings and appearing at different levels of the system, the bureaucracy, getting several judgments, yet I still have money outstanding."

"Not many have the time, the patience or the resources to litigate these matters. It is the opinion of this landlord that the system, which has seen benefits over the years, has to be simplified, the process more friendly.... One has

no idea until they experience this bureaucracy from a person with no idea of where to start, the frustration of where to turn or what to do now. To go to the tribunal to be turned away because of an incorrect process, incorrect form served, to hear that the tenant has access to duty counsel, while the landlord has no support."

He's among a number of landlords asking me why the government doesn't take an obvious look at this problem and try to get the process streamlined for both sides, for both landlords and tenants. Instead, the current system is bogged down with procedural matters and bureaucratic delays that will only perpetuate the original complaint that's lodged. Rather than sorting out the conflicts and having an atmosphere at the board, the board makes the situation worse.

Ted gave me a solution. He said, "If the minister really wants an understanding of the struggle that it can be for a landlord to recover back rent from a tenant or to be compensated for property damage, she should go through the process herself." If she did, I would suspect that she'd be a little more motivated as the minister to press for some long-overdue reform to the system.

On behalf of those people that have complained, both on the landlord and tenant sides: I think we have to add to their voices and I think we have to look farther than just this Landlord and Tenant Board filing fee for low-income Ontarians and look at the real root of the problem. Let's try to get some real reform in the system.

I want to go back to Bill 14 and the substantive change that I think we all support, and that's the main intention of the bill, which amends the Residential Tenancies Act and the Co-operative Corporations Act. As many people know from the previous bill, the Energy Consumer Protection Act and the Ontario Clean Energy Benefit Act are also being amended. The primary purpose of the bill, as we all know, is to move co-op tenure disputes out of the courts and put them into the Landlord and Tenant Board.

Proponents of the legislation—I introduced them to you earlier—have said it will streamline the dispute process, make it faster, more efficient and most importantly, most cost-effective and transparent for co-ops and their members. Those are some of the many reasons why this is long overdue in the system. We already have a clogged court system that doesn't need any additional burden when it comes to its dockets for dealing with this matter that could easily be dealt with in a very economical way at the Landlord and Tenant Board. Any reasonable measures we can implement to reduce the number of cases before the courts should be pursued. Reducing the clutter on court dockets is a good thing, especially when we consider that courts really are not the appropriate venue to deal with these disputes between landlords and tenants over tenure, not when any other landlord in the province dealing with the same eviction and other dispute processes deals with the well-established Landlord and Tenant Board process. It only makes sense for us to move the co-op process in that as well.

But we can't do this under the existing legislation because co-op accommodations are governed by the Co-

operative Corporations Act rather than the Residential Tenancies Act. In welcoming this move to the Landlord and Tenant Board, I want to remind everyone tuning in of my earlier comments about the problems that are plaguing the board. We've got both landlords and tenants not happy with the way the board deals with it—and I think especially if the fee waiver, as part of Bill 14, goes forward, it's going to inevitably create more complaints and it's going to delay the process even more. So, regardless of those concerns, I think everyone can agree that on the co-op side, the courts aren't the right venue, and these changes specifically that have been requested in the other two bills—I want to reiterate that Bill 65 and Bill 198 only dealt with those co-op bills. It's not like Bill 14 that's got this extra change in it.

I think, as well, there are about 300 of these disputes that end up in our court system every year. I mentioned earlier, in starting my speech, that it costs about \$1 million a year—something that we would much rather have reinvested into our co-ops. The average case typically costs between \$3,000 and \$5,000, and the extreme case can cost the co-op up to \$50,000. That's just unacceptable when we look at a far more economical way to handle it. Those figures don't also take the tremendous time that is taken away from the co-op family in dealing with this system. So it's very unfortunate that we've taken so long to get to this situation.

The fact that we didn't get Bill 65 passed last year means that the courts are going to be dealing with complaints that we all could have stopped. That's the criminal part of it, the fact that we had an opportunity last fall to stop this, and I think we can all look with some apology towards our friends in the gallery, that we were unable to manage ourselves accordingly to get this bill passed. I think the whole proroguing the Legislature was a shame when it dealt with a bill that was on the cusp of getting all-party support.

Anyway, the provisions under part 5 of the RTA are the same that any landlord in the province would have to evict a tenant. The co-operative has basically two avenues to terminate a member's occupancy. As with other landlords, the co-op can issue a member a notice when it is pursuing an eviction under one or more of the 11 instances set out under the Residential Tenancies Act. They include nonpayment of rent, committing illegal acts or causing wilful damage to the property.

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The new process would allow the co-operative to pursue an eviction from the LTB without notice, in some limited circumstances. These include where a former co-op member has terminated his or her membership and therefore their occupancy rights; where the member's occupancy rights have expired by virtue of a predetermined date; and where the former member is a post-secondary student in a student housing co-operative and has given notice of termination. They're very straightforward circumstances which, under the existing system, would have required them to head to court and complete really what amounts to some routine paperwork. Under

the bill, they'll be able to get these situations resolved. Their application will be directly to the Landlord and Tenant Board.

We should note that the legislation does not entirely remove the role of the courts in the dispute resolution process. There are still going to remain some tenure disputes that will continue to have to go to the courts because they're not spelled out in the Residential Tenancies Act. These deal with specific bylaws to individual co-ops that will include provisions such as the no-pets rule violations, or failure to undertake member duties such as snow removal and lawn care. These disputes that can't be resolved by the co-op board will still ultimately have to be adjudicated in the province's courts. So we've got that issue that's still there, but from my recollection of Bill 65, that's a very small portion—extremely small—and I think normally it's resolved right at the board level, because of its nature.

Again, the new section is going to add the fact that we're going to ensure that cases will be judged on the merits of their case. In other words, procedural irregularities will no longer be able to trump the basis upon which a co-op decided to revoke a person's membership. I think that's very important. It's something that I've heard ever since I was elected—three years ago today, Speaker. It's my anniversary today. Three years ago, I was elected MPP.

Applause.

Mr. Steve Clark: You're not going to clap, John?

Applause.

Mr. Steve Clark: Thank you, John. Thank you. I appreciate that. I owe you one.

I think it's very important for us to look at Bill 14. It also changes the co-op act in a number of ways, to streamline the internal dispute resolution process used by individual co-operatives. Co-ops have functioned very well under these very democratic rules for years, and it's essential that they retain the ability to do so, regardless of amendments outlined in Bill 14.

When I visited Stoa and visited my own co-ops in the past, there has been that level of co-operation. They've been able to use the democratic rules that they've all set down, to be able to deal with those disputes in a timely basis.

Again, these are all changes that the Co-operative Housing Federation and many other proponents have been asking the Legislature to deal with for a few years.

That's just the Coles Notes version—I know we'll all probably do a Coles Notes version of the background—but I think it's very important that, unlike the fee waiver amendment tacked onto this bill, nothing else other than that section was really new or surprising.

Any MPP who has ever had a meeting with the co-op industry, anyone who has ever sat down with co-ops in your riding, pretty well knows the basic parts of this bill. Like the minister, I want to let everyone know how important we in the official opposition believe the role is that Ontario's co-ops have in our housing mix.

It didn't take me very long, when I was elected at the municipal level some 30 years ago, to know the importance of a co-op in your community and the fact that their structure is somewhat different from some of the other housing groups. Maybe some communities, some members, have housing boards that they've set up over the years. I just think the co-op provides a really unique opportunity. I know that the ones that I've visited really show how diverse a population lives in our residence.

But it also shows the pride that they have. That's the thing I can't get over, the pride they have, not just in their co-op but in the whole process, that whole democracy that makes up a co-op.

On the tour we had in Burlington, you had some people who were genuinely proud of their homes, proud of their neighbours and proud of what they had been able to accomplish in a democratic co-op over the years; a wide mix of people's backgrounds, young and old—really a unique gem that we have. I think, if we were to look at what we should be talking about, it's how we can enable more success stories like co-ops.

That's what we miss in this debate. That's what we missed last fall when we were debating Bill 19 and Bill 65. We were really missing the opportunity. How can we put in place in legislation an opportunity to grow co-ops, to expand co-ops, to make sure that this unique gem that we have in the province can be increased and that more people can be associated with it? I think too many times we spin our wheels with some procedure where, in fact, if we all sat down and looked at the success that co-ops provide, I think it would be a great opportunity for us.

I have to say that I want to thank the federation for being here today and for all the education that they have done, both last fall and since this bill has been tabled. They're one of those very unique groups that I think we can all celebrate when it comes to people who talk to us about necessary changes to legislation. I'm very sorry that the process that brought Bill 198 to the floor, that brought Bill 65 to the floor, isn't the same process that we are seeing with Bill 14.

Currently, as most people know, there are 550 non-profit co-operatives in Ontario. That adds up to a little over 44,000 households; 125,000 people live in co-ops in the province. I think any member of the Legislature who is speaking—we've got a pretty good record: Out of 107 ridings, co-ops appear in 95 ridings. So I expect when members are giving their questions and comments, or they're having their speeches, they'd better do a shout-out to the co-op in their riding. I'm looking at you, Minister of Labour.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Always. I have great co-ops in my riding.

Mr. Steve Clark: Okay; that's good.

So I have to do a shout-out for my co-ops before the two minutes that are left in my speech are over. I'm proud to represent two co-ops in the city of Brockville: the Brock-Seaway Housing Co-operative on Dana Street and the Shepherd's Green Co-operative Homes on Liston Avenue. These 30-unit co-ops are just like others across

the province. They are home to a mix of families. I have to say, Speaker, they're bustling with activity.

But we know that even in the best of circumstances and in the best accommodations, there are always going to be issues that arise in landlord and tenant relationships, and sometimes these issues can't be resolved in that democracy that we know is our co-op system. That's why I welcome so much of what Bill 14 is intended to do, because it means we won't see those tenure disputes dragged into the courts. We won't see that \$1 million wasted, where it could be put into developing more of this wonderful co-op home situation.

So just in closing, I could speak—I've only got 56 seconds. Maybe they'll give me unanimous consent for doing another half-hour.

Interjections.

Mr. Steve Clark: I didn't ask for it.

So I want to make sure we look at the minister and we say to the minister that there is an opportunity, I think, to look back at Bill 65, to look at the co-operation that existed. If you're going to look at changes to the Landlord and Tenant Board, I've got just in my own speech here and in these other pages that I'm not going to read, that I could read, a laundry list of other changes that people are proposing. So either give people the chance to discuss it or remove the section, and let's get back to the original intent of Bill 65, which died on the order paper when Dalton McGuinty prorogued the Legislature.

With that, I'll let some questions and comments, and I welcome comments from the government on amending the bill.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I just wanted to make some comments on the member's opening remarks, the speech on G14, the Non-profit Housing Co-operatives Statue Law Amendment Act, that is being reintroduced. It was here in the House last session as Bill 65, and now it has been reintroduced. I'm glad it is being reintroduced, and it sounds like each party is in favour of passing this bill.

One provision that is in it now that wasn't there before is a change to the Residential Tenancies Act that authorizes the Landlord and Tenant Board to waive or defer fees or charges for low-income Ontarians. That way, if you're going to dispute the filing with the Landlord and Tenant Board, at least if you're a low-income person and you live in that housing in the co-op, you won't have to pay that \$45 to file your application with the Landlord and Tenant Board. That gives you an incentive or a reason, economically, to defend yourself.

Not everybody who is a low-income person can afford that \$45. It is a lot of money to someone who doesn't have a lot of income. When we look at the amount of applications that go through annually at the Landlord and Tenant Board, you're looking at about 300 per year on average—

Interjection: In the courts.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: —in the courts, excuse me—so, 300 applications per year in the courts at a \$45 charge for an application. That's not a lot of money for the courts to lose. It's a drop in the bucket compared to someone with a low income and how they have to struggle to pay for that application fee.

I think it's a very good amendment that that fee is taken out so it can go through the Landlord and Tenant Board, so that tenants have a voice and can defend themselves in the right venue, as opposed to the courts that are going to have a long, drawn-out process and can get quite expensive for both co-ops and tenants. So it's a fair amendment in this bill today, and I'm glad to see it in there.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: I just wanted to add my comments. I want to agree with the member from London—Fanshawe about this amendment, and I just want to ensure that the member from Leeds—Grenville—first of all, I appreciate his generally supportive comments and I appreciate that it was a challenging time to be briefed with regard to the legislation. I appreciate his accommodating the timing. It was a little struggle for all of us because of the conference.

He did suggest in his comments that we made a mistake. I want to let him know it was not a mistake; it was a deliberate choice. At the end of the day, we heard from people like the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario. This was designed to help low- and modest-income tenants. This is about making sure that people with limited income have access to justice and are listened to, and we thought waiving these fees would bring consistency, as well, to how the disputes are treated, just like every other tribunal.

The fee waiver program exists in other tribunals. We know it's in the Ontario Municipal Board; we know the Assessment Review Board also has this fee waiver program. This was an interesting conversation, but I wanted to assure him it was not a mistake; it was a deliberate choice to ensure that we support those low- and modest-income families who, through no fault of their own, don't have the means to question or challenge decisions that are made by their landlord.

I think this is an important amendment, and I value his input and look forward to further conversations. But again, this was about providing consistency and fairness, and we think it's reasonable to suggest that we have that conversation going forward so that it matches other tribunals.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'm proud to add my two cents to the comments made by our municipal affairs critic from Leeds—Grenville, who has taken a strong hand and great strength in showing a good balance of how parties should work together in trying to get Bill 65 passed in the last session.

I met with the co-ops in my riding in the last few weeks, and it was a great opportunity to meet and learn

about co-ops in Elgin—Middlesex—London. The main message I received from that meeting was, Bill 65 is what they wanted. Bill 65 is something we should have supported in the last session, and they were really disappointed that prorogation—when the government ran away from their responsibilities—led to the end of Bill 65.

It was at that meeting that I said, "Well, it will be great. The bill will come back." There was support from all three parties. There was no reason at all why I would suspect that there would be any changes, considering all three parties supported the bill, and it was something the co-ops themselves were in full support of. Lo and behold, they decided to change it. You would think, since it's hard enough for this Legislature to get three parties on board on anything, that once you've attained success, you wouldn't go forward and make changes. You wouldn't put the poison pill in.

I like the comment on the elixir of collaboration, I guess you were saying. I'm a pharmacist by trade. I used to make quite a few elixirs for my clients, and I know how precious they are when you make them and that if you start messing around with a little bit of the recipe, you screw it up.

I'm hoping that we can work through this change in Bill 14 so that we can work together and do what's right for the residents of condos throughout this riding. We should sit down and listen to the member from Leeds—Grenville. He has a strong handle on this situation, and we look forward to more comments.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's my pleasure, actually, to weigh in on this conversation. I'd like to thank the member from Leeds—Grenville for speaking for an entire hour on the issue. That's quite an accomplishment. Also, my colleague from London—Fanshawe made some very good points that I'd like to touch on as well.

First, I think you're quite right: You have to give credit to the co-ops that are in your communities. Certainly, in Kitchener—Waterloo we have a number of them that have been very progressive, and quite honestly, they have filled the gap in our community around affordable housing. Local leadership has actually superseded anything that we could do in this House, but I think that this is an opportunity for us to stand up and be supportive of the co-operative housing movement.

When I met with the co-op leaders in my community, certainly the students raised some very good points around a very supportive model that they recognize is helping them transition from high school into a co-op model of housing when they go to post-secondary education. Certainly, this is an aspect that's quite honestly missing and an area that we can improve upon.

I think it's important also to recognize that the NDP has proposed a range of other ways to make it easier for tenants to have their concerns heard at the Landlord and Tenant Board. Some advocates, even Chief Justice LeSage in his inquiry into the death of Al Gosling, pro-

pose that the Landlord and Tenant Board should have the power to determine subsidy questions in order to resolve disputes about arrears, and currently they are prohibited from doing so.

So I think that what we have here is an opportunity. It should have happened in the fall. Prorogation interrupted this conversation, this discussion and this opportunity for us to actually truly shine as a province on the co-operative housing movement. I look forward to supporting it and working in my community and in the province to strengthen and grow the co-operative housing movement.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments. We return to the member for Leeds-Grenville.

Mr. Steve Clark: Speaker, thank you for returning to me so quickly. I'd like to thank the member from London-Fanshawe, the member for Elgin-Middlesex-London, the member for Kitchener-Waterloo and last, but certainly not least, the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

I want to thank the minister for her clarification. I'm not sure if she said it was a deliberate mistake that the ministry made, but she and I will have to have more conversations about this bill as it moves forward in second reading. I appreciate that the member for Kitchener-Waterloo mentioned some other gaps in the Landlord and Tenant Board system, and I appreciate the suggestion that she put forward.

I really think that there are two separate things here. We've got a bill that was here in the fall. The only reason it wasn't passed was because Dalton McGuinty shuttered this Legislature for 128 days. We had many bills—not just on this—on the order paper.

Interjection.

Mr. Steve Clark: You could have given your two minutes of questions and comments. You could have trumped the minister.

1600

I think what we're talking about is that we had a bill that we all co-operated on, and now we've got some changes. I think, whether it's this bill in its previous Bill 65 form—and a hundred other bills, there were a number of bills that I think we had some general agreement on, and there's been no effort by this government to bring back the bill we supported. There's been no effort by this government to bring back some of the other bills, some of the bills that we had on the order paper, that the New Democrats had and even some of the government bills that had general support. We're not, again, having this level of co-operation that the Premier talked about in all of those newspaper headlines, and I really believe that the minister has an opportunity to fast-track this bill by separating the portions of the bill that we all agreed on and moving those forward as soon as possible.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I understand that the government House leader has a point of order that he'd like to raise.

Hon. John Milloy: I think you'll find that we have unanimous consent to revert to motions.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The government House leader is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to revert to motions. Agreed? Agreed.

Government House leader.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. John Milloy: I have two motions; I'll give you notice here.

The first is that I believe we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Is there unanimous consent to move forward with a motion with respect to private members' public business? Agreed?

Hon. John Milloy: I move that, notwithstanding standing order 98(b), the following changes be made to the ballot list, dated March 07, 2013, for private members' public business:

Mr. Wilson and Mr. Yakabuski exchange places in order of precedence such that Mr. Wilson assumes ballot item number 9 and Mr. Yakabuski assumes ballot item number 4.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

COMMITTEE SITTINGS

Hon. John Milloy: I seek unanimous consent to move a motion without notice concerning the meeting of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs and that the Speaker shall put the question without debate or amendment.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Does the House concur? Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. John Milloy: I move that the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs be authorized to meet on March 11, 12, 13 and 22, 2013 and April 3 and 4, 2013, for the purpose of conducting pre-budget consultations.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

NON-PROFIT HOUSING CO-OPERATIVES STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2013 LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LES COOPÉRATIVES DE LOGEMENT SANS BUT LUCRATIF

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate? I'm pleased to recognize the member for Welland.

Ms. Cindy Forster: I just want to first tell you that I won't be speaking for the entire hour. I will be sharing my time with my colleagues from London—Fanshawe and from Kitchener—Waterloo. We may or may not use the whole hour.

I'm pleased to actually be here again today talking about Bill 14, formerly Bill 65 with some amendments. I want to take the opportunity to once again recognize our friends in the gallery from the co-op federation: Harvey Cooper, Dale Reagan and other staff, as well. They are tenacious in being here to represent the issues that are important to them.

This bill amends the Residential Tenancies Act and the Co-operative Corporations Act to move certain co-op disputes out of the courts and into the Landlord and Tenant Board. Disputes not provided for under the RTA will be things such as no pets, failure to fulfill your co-op duties as those may be, and members' disputes over provider overcharges or maintenance. Those things would continue to go through the courts. Hopefully, those will be considerably fewer numbers, though, than the 300 per year.

There would be no appeal to decisions made by co-op boards unless expressly committed in co-ops by law. Now, I understand that some co-ops actually have an appeal process and some don't. In my discussions with the co-op federation, they tell me that there are plenty of checks and balances within the co-op processes, and we look forward to having some of those discussions when this bill gets to committee.

The reason I'm not taking my whole hour today is because I'd like to see this bill actually move along through the system before this session ends; then the federation wouldn't have to wait for another session. It was actually in 2004 when they originally brought this issue forward to the parties and the government to review, and it has been promised since about 2007. So it's about time that in fact we deal with this issue.

The new amendment, of course, is to waive the fee of \$45, the application fee that was waived in the court system, and now to apply that to the Landlord and Tenant Board process—a small amount of money which may assist a lot of people. I heard from previous presenters that they weren't necessarily in favour of this. I can tell you that many low-income people who live in my riding are hard-pressed to pay for the bus to get to the hearing. So I think it's very important that people have the right to represent themselves, and at a cost of \$45, I don't think that it's going to be a huge impact to the tribunal's ability to process these claims. So, back in 2007, the government promised to take action on this issue. As I said, we welcome the new amendment to provide tenants with more affordable access.

In addition, this bill is very limited in scope and it will do little to address the fundamental problems of the lack of housing that so many people who live in this province face. The most recent numbers that I've looked at: 170,000 households—I wouldn't even hazard a guess at how many people that amounts to—and 80,000 plus, just

in the city of Toronto. Households that are on the wait-list equate to 150,000 people here in the city of Toronto who are waiting for affordable housing.

This government, though, needs to address the housing struggles here in the province of Ontario. They need to move ahead with a housing benefit, and they need to put stronger protections in place for their tenants.

It was interesting today, actually, as I was doing a little prep work, that there was this article in the Toronto Star, "Making Room for Rent in Toronto's Boom: Part of the Province's Planning Act Makes It Possible—Just Not Popular." I quote: "An innovative approach to section 37 provisions could see more residential towers include some form of subsidized housing to aid tenants squeezed out of the highly competitive rental market."

Speaker, there are, I think, 157 condo projects going on here in the city of Toronto—157 agreements, actually, between the city of Toronto under section 37, which yielded a cash component to the city of Toronto of \$136 million. Imagine the number of subsidized units that could have been built in condominiums here in the city if they had done the density bonusing as opposed to taking the cash.

Now, I'm not saying that the cash wasn't used for good purposes. It was used sometimes for open spaces; it was used for perhaps playground equipment. But whatever it was, the need is far greater for subsidized housing.

I think that there are a couple of projects. One of them, I think, is with the Co-op Housing Federation, for 12 units in a building that's going to be opening in 2015 or 2016. That's a good start, but I think we should be finding ways to make sure that there are subsidized housing units in every project here in the city of Toronto and across the province.

1610

My quote was actually from Simon Kent's article today in the Toronto Sun.

I want to talk a little about co-op housing in my riding. There are 550 units in my riding, and they are very vibrant communities. I live right next door to a co-op. There are co-op apartments, co-op townhouses, and there is a retirement village in that same complex. I can tell you that there are many events that take place in that community. People who live in the three sectors of it all get along well. They have many celebrations there throughout the year, on Canada Day, for Labour Day; they have Christmas functions. The little kids, new immigrants, right up to the seniors in the retirement facility, cohabitare and get along very well.

One of the more important co-ops in my riding, though, is the Mel Swart Co-op. Mel Swart was a long-time, well-respected New Democrat MPP here. Many of you here today may remember Mel. I said that things are often named after people when they pass, but Mel was so respected in our riding that they actually named the co-op for him while he was still alive and while he was a member of this government.

There are many other things that I think need to be done.

One of the benefits of the bill is that the tribunal system would be fairer and less costly for co-ops and the co-op staff would be able to handle those evictions for arrears without a lawyer. The lawyers may not be happy, because in fact they're going to lose some business, but the co-ops would make better use of the dollars that they have. The fee at the Landlord and Tenant Board is quite modest, and the evictions would no longer fail for technical reasons, such as not having the right person sign the various notices. Hopefully, it will be a faster process to resolve disputes. That would mean a reduced loss of income to the co-op due to a reduced period when members are not paying their rent—because I'm told that sometimes it took months to get through the court process.

For the co-op members, the court system is also a very expensive process if you're not entitled to legal aid, and in many instances people don't qualify these days for legal aid and they wouldn't have the financial resources to actually contest an eviction.

The tribunal system would be much fairer to members facing an eviction. Cases would be decided faster. The member would only be evicted if the Landlord and Tenant Board found that the facts justified an eviction, and members who do not qualify for legal aid would be able to defend themselves without going into debt to pay a lawyer or going through a complex court system.

For the wider public, there are also advantages, and those advantages are that the public costs of administering those evictions through the courts are much higher than they would be in the tribunal system, so we're actually saving taxpayer dollars, or hopefully we're moving other more important cases through the process. Hearing the co-op evictions in the courts adds to the backlogs. Increasingly, lawmakers are trying to keep civil cases out of the courts. Mediation and arbitration are amongst the tools that are being used to settle disputes in ways that are both fairer and more affordable.

This bill would improve access to the Landlord and Tenant Board. Courts and tribunals in Ontario are currently allowed to waive or defer fees charged to low-income Ontarians. Bill 14 will ensure that low-income tenants get the same treatment at the Landlord and Tenant Board. Currently, the fees make it difficult for low-income tenants to have access.

There are some limitations of the bill, still, and I'm hoping, as we get this to committee, that we'll be able to have some discussions about those issues and resolve them. So I guess while the bill is a step in improving the resolution of conflicts in the co-ops, some concerns merit better discussion on the issues. Moreover, it should be recognized that the bill is a very small step and that other actions are needed to protect the interests of tenants and co-op members and to ensure access to safe, affordable housing here in Ontario. We need to strike the right balance to ensure that co-op members have the individual rights of other tenants while respecting the unique nature of co-ops.

Some tenant advocates I've met with over the last few months while we were prorogued and last year during the

session say that the bill does not go far enough in protecting tenants' rights. Meanwhile, co-op leaders argue that the situation of co-op members is different from tenants and that they have additional rights due to the democratic nature in making decisions that involve them and others in the co-op.

Some of the tenant advocates are concerned that the bill, as it stands, does not permit co-operatives to make applications to the Landlord and Tenant Board to address issues of interference with occupancy, harassment by the co-op or non-repair issues in their units. Some advocates also believe that all eviction applications by the Landlord and Tenant Board—and that continuing some evictions in court makes no sense, that we should have it either one way or the other. As I said, hopefully, we can have some of these discussions when we get to committee. If we need to make some amendments, that will be the place to do it.

Finally, there's a concern that co-op members will no longer have the right to appeal to the co-op membership. The bill leaves it up to individual co-ops to decide. Both sides of these issues and concerns will be explored at the committee hearings.

Bill 14's amendment allows the Landlord and Tenant Board to waive or defer the fees, as I've already discussed. Housing advocates have been advocating for that for 10 years, so I think that that is a good thing. A range of other protections for low-income tenants should be considered, but not as part of this bill. But in the very near future, I'm hoping that the government will bring forward bills, and certainly our party will be bringing forward bills as well.

The NDP, over the last number of years, has proposed a number of other ways to make it easier for tenants to have their concerns addressed at the Landlord and Tenant Board; for example, providing tenants with the right to request a review at the Landlord and Tenant Board, without charge, regarding the not-reasonably-able-to-participate test for tenants unable to attend hearings for good reason and increasing the time limit for tenants' complaints to the Landlord and Tenant Board to two years.

Second, some advocates, even Chief Justice LeSage in his inquiry into the death of Al Gosling, proposed that the LTB should have the power to determine subsidy questions.

Third, there needs to be a discussion about ways to better protect tenants through strengthening rent control, so closing the loophole that currently allows landlords to impose uncontrolled rent increases on tenants renting vacant units by ensuring that rent regulation is applied to all rental units, whether vacant or occupied. This issue is really about—back in the mid-1990s, there was a hope that there would be a push by business to build a bunch of rental units, particularly here in Toronto where there was a great need for some affordable housing units. So this loophole was allowed and so anything after 1998 actually is exempted. It is kind of very problematic because, as tenants leave their units, as people perhaps

get a better job and move on, there is no longer rent control applied to those units.

This past summer, I actually came across a couple in my riding by the name of Ross and Joanne Battle. Ross has a long history of medical issues. He goes to dialysis three or four times a week. He is in a motorized wheelchair and lived on the third or fourth floor of an apartment that is covered—it was a pre-1998 building—and the elevator broke. The elevator was out for three or four days. He had to be carried down, and he went into a hotel for a few days to make sure that he would be able to get back and forth to his dialysis appointments.

When he was able to return, when the elevator was fixed, he made application to his landlord for a first-floor unit because of his medical issues; in the event that the elevator broke again, he could still get to his dialysis. He was told by the superintendent of the building that yes, when a first-floor unit became available, he could move into it, but it would be vacant, so he would have to pay \$100 more rent for that unit. Not only was there vacancy decontrol on his unit that he was vacating, but it was on the unit that he was going to be going into. Even though he has lived in this building for 10 years, they were going to impose this \$100-a-month increase on this man who wanted to move for medical reasons. It was like a two for one. I encouraged the man to file a complaint with the Ontario Human Rights Commission. I don't know whether that has happened to date, but I hope it has, and I hope that they are addressing it on his medical grounds.

1620

Just moving on to broader action to improve access to affordable quality housing, we need to make sure we have broad, timely action to secure affordable and safe housing for all Ontarians. Housing is becoming less and less affordable. We're told that more than 50% of people pay more than 50% of their income on rent for low- and modest-income Ontarians. As I said earlier, the waiting lists for social housing have swelled.

In 2009, the Ontario government spent only \$64 per capita on affordable housing, which is half of what all the other provinces across Canada actually spend on affordable housing. According to the government numbers posted on the website last fall, 16,000 new and occupied units have been created under the federal housing program, but that is far short of the promise of 2003, where the Liberal government actually promised 20,000 units.

So the government needs to take action now in dealing with the crisis in housing, and there's a number of actions that it needs to take. They need to stop the erosion of federal and provincial funding for affordable housing. There has been an ongoing erosion of that federal funding support both for existing affordable houses and for new houses. Ontario has tended to follow the federal funding, and despite short-term bursts in new funding, the overall picture over the last two decades has been a steady erosion of that funding and the programs.

I can tell you of an example even in my riding. There's a building where my constituency office is located; it's called Canal View Homes. It's about a 72-

unit apartment building, and it was built on the model of a supportive housing program. For 20 years—I think about 45 of the 72 units are available for people with mental health and disability issues. Just last year the government pulled back on that funding, most of it at a federal level but some at a provincial level. Now the people who live in that housing do not have any supports in place. I'm told that they are starting to have multiple admissions again to the mental health units in our hospitals. During the 20-year period when they had supports, many of them didn't have one admission to the hospital. There's a great need, not just to build housing, but to make sure that there are supports for people with mental health and disability issues to keep them in that housing, and to keep them from recycling into hospitals and perhaps into correctional facilities.

In 2009, the Auditor General reported on the lack of access to social housing, the lack of ministry staff resources for housing programs, the lack of proper asset management and the general lack of provincial strategy to ensure sustainable long-term housing in sufficient numbers as well as well-maintained social housing units. I can tell you from my research when Bill 65 came forward, I met with numerous people in my riding and I met with ACORN here in Toronto. The message I got about some of the bad housing units that exist in many of our ridings was not very comforting: elevators that aren't operating for periods of a year or longer; people promised that they have a parking spot when they rent a unit, only to find out that they're getting ticketed on a city street; no insulation in the building, leading to \$500-a-month heating bills in the winter. So, not only do we have to have more housing, but we have to ensure that the housing we have is maintained in a respectful and appropriate manner.

I've heard from people who said, "Well, you know, that's a bylaw issue in the municipalities." We all know that municipalities are struggling as the government continues to make cuts to some of their budgets. In my own riding, we might have two bylaw officers, one of which would be responsible for something like this. So, to have one bylaw officer responsible for—I don't know—perhaps 1,000 rental units is not going to go a long way to making sure that people have good, maintained housing.

Even Don Drummond, in his 2012 report last year, raised this issue and said that the province needs to both accept its responsibility to work with municipal housing service managers and affordable housing providers to stabilize funding, and aggressively negotiate with the federal government to get them back to the table and make some investments in this important area.

I think the government should take up Mr. Drummond's recommendation and take leadership with other provinces at a federal level in negotiating a long-term national affordable housing plan with adequate funding. We as a government here in Ontario shouldn't just sit back and accept the federal Conservatives withdrawing from the need for housing across Canada. Ontario—

we're the largest province—should be a leader among the provinces in negotiating a new framework that clearly assigns the roles and responsibilities for federal, provincial, territorial and municipal governments, aboriginal groups, and community and private sector interests. That was the goal of Bill C-400, an NDP private member's bill that was recently and unfortunately defeated at second reading in the House of Commons.

At the provincial level, the Minister of Health announced that ongoing funding will be provided for the Mental Health Commission's very successful Housing First project in Toronto. That's good, but the government needs to work with the federal government and communities to roll out innovative housing in all parts of Ontario and not just a small pilot in Toronto.

As I said a few minutes ago, the supportive housing piece has to be there. There's no point in rolling out a project and putting some supportive housing in place, only to say a few years later, "Oh, we can't afford that anymore, so we're going to withdraw that," and then we see those same people recycle through hospitals and through our correctional facilities at much larger cost than it would be to provide them with supports in the first place.

In the throne speech, the government—the new Premier, Premier Wynne—talked about the need to ensure that all Ontarians have access to safe and affordable housing. Unfortunately, though, it was really just some talk. There was no policy; there's no program or funding attached to her words. We need action, not words. We need to actually get results for Ontarians.

Ontario's housing policy statement, part of the so-called Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy, requires all municipal service managers to have a comprehensive housing and homelessness plan in place by January 2014. Well that's good, but the government hasn't given the municipalities any useful tools to turn local plans from dreams to solid plans. I can tell you, Speaker, that I sat on the Niagara Regional Housing Board as vice-chair for five years, from 2004 to 2009, and we went through this exercise where they had to come up with a very similar plan. We jumped through all kinds of hoops to try and get it done, but it didn't result in any significant new housing development projects in Niagara or anywhere else across this province.

1630

Hon. James J. Bradley: What about that one in Welland you and I were at?

Ms. Cindy Forster: To the minister: Yes, there was one in Welland, a project—

Hon. James J. Bradley: A very good one.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Yes; that is a very good project.

Interjection: One.

Ms. Cindy Forster: One, though. It's a project in conjunction with Goodwill Industries. Goodwill actually has a store, and I think there are 24 seniors' apartments in that building. But we need many more of them in the Niagara region. We have more than 10,000 households on wait-lists for affordable housing.

In fact, I was at the Ukrainian-Greek Catholic church pre-Easter dinner yesterday with our good friend, the former MPP, Mr. Kormos. I was approached by several seniors there who are actually waiting to get into seniors' housing in Welland, and one of them has been waiting as long as three years. She's 90 years old. She's been waiting three years, and she said, "I may die before I ever actually get into the seniors' housing." Her choices are somewhat limited because she speaks mostly Hungarian, as do many who live in my fine city, but it's a shame that seniors are having to struggle and stay in their houses because there aren't enough units for them to actually move into, but they're not ready yet to move into a retirement facility, and they're not ill enough—

Interjection.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Yes, and on top of that, there's the whole home care issue as well that I hear my colleagues talking about behind me.

So there needs to be a lot more action. I think the housing plan that the government has put to the municipalities to develop by 2014—I think the government needs to actually set up some targets and they need to actually set up some funding to go along with those targets the Liberal government promised three years ago when it launched its housing plan consultations. So far, we haven't seen very much come out of that.

We need to make the capital available for that funding as well. Initially capitalized at \$500 million, the fund could be expanded and the funding criteria changed to more closely meet the housing needs in each of the areas, including new construction, repairs, renovation and green building initiatives.

Another area where we could actually make some strides in housing is, my colleague from Parkdale—

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: High Park.

Ms. Cindy Forster: —High Park put forward an inclusionary zoning motion—

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: And it's coming back again.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Twice?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Twice.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Twice—and it's coming back for a third time. Our party has long advocated for that, requiring developers to ensure a small percentage of affordable housing units in new developments.

The government has failed to put in place those inclusionary zoning policies, which would allow municipalities to require developers to include a minimum number. I talked about that with this article that was in the newspaper today from Simon Kent, and there is a project going forward with the co-op federation that will see 12 units in a 62-storey tower—694 condo units, 12 of which will be managed by the co-ops. So it is a very small step, and as I said before, if every one of those 157 condo projects in the province added 12 or maybe even 24 units, it would go a long way to addressing the needs of people here in the city of Toronto.

A growing number of municipalities see the inclusionary zoning as something that would generate a lot more affordable housing, and many of them actually

support it. A simple amendment to the Planning Act, as proposed by the NDP, would allow the municipalities to actually move ahead.

Now, during our election platform in 2011, we proposed a housing benefit. Affordability remains the biggest housing challenge in almost every part of the province.

This week, I was over at the YWCA to talk about their “housing first for women” project, and they were telling me about their building there. Even in a subsidized way in Toronto, a two-bedroom apartment is \$1,200 a month; a three-bedroom apartment is \$1,300. I don’t know how people, even in a subsidized setting, actually can afford to pay those rents. Speaker, I’m in the process of looking for a space in Toronto myself, and I can tell you that you cannot find anything in this downtown core that is under \$1,500, \$1,600, \$1,700. I don’t know how people who are living on low and middle incomes can actually afford to live in downtown Toronto.

A housing benefit, properly designed, would help stabilize precariously housed renter households. We heard about precarious work recently. The United Way and McMaster put out a report—I think it was in the Star last Saturday or a week ago Saturday—and it talked about how we used to think precarious employment only belonged to the low-income group. In fact, it belongs to people making between \$50,000 and \$100,000. So many of them between the ages of 25 and 65 are in precarious employment. They’re in a temporary contract; they don’t know if that contract is going to extend beyond the six months or the year that they are in it. I think that making sure there is enough affordable housing stock across this province is a way to assist people who find themselves in this precarious employment, along with moving forward with making sure that people have work that isn’t precarious.

I just want to end by talking about the importance of the co-ops to housing and to our communities. Across Canada, 2,100 co-ops are available and are home—and I say “home,” not “house”—to a quarter of a million people in over 90,000 households. There are 550 co-ops across the province, with 47,000 units and 125,000 residents. They cost less to operate—14% less than municipal or private non-profit housing, according to a CMHC study, and successive program evaluations by CMHC found that co-ops provide a platform for residents to develop many new skills and acquire organizational experience and gainful employment.

I can tell you that in my own riding in Niagara, Niagara Regional Housing, which manages a number of co-ops in my area, has several really good programs where they’ve been able to lift women out of poverty with skills training and with assisting them in opening small businesses. They do a great job in that area, and there really is an improved sense of community and better relations with neighbours. There are social supports available that I talk about the great need for when we’re looking at some of these programs. As direct stakeholders, members are motivated to act responsibly.

They are able to kind of discuss their issues at co-op board meetings and to work collectively to actually run their co-ops. In that way, they keep the costs down for themselves, as well as for the co-op. They have a proven track record of providing a supply of permanently affordable housing, creating mixed stable-income communities in cities and towns throughout Ontario.

Unfortunately, the existing affordable housing program is oriented toward private sector developers and municipal governments that can contribute equity and have the capacity to develop proposals in a way no community-based sponsor can compete with. This has resulted, to a great extent, in small-scale community-based housing proponents being totally shut out of the project, and the co-ops have been particularly disadvantaged. Municipalities and perhaps provincial governments need to make vacant land available to co-ops to actually level out the playing field for them.

1640

I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak to this issue today, thank the minister for bringing the issue forward—although I wish we had been able to deal with it in the last session—and thank our friends from the co-op for being tenacious and bringing it forward again. Hopefully, we can move debate along really quickly and get this going.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Kitchener-Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It’s a pleasure to get up and have an opportunity to speak to this important piece of legislation. Like many of my colleagues in this House, I wish that it had happened in the fall, but there’s some urgency, so let’s get this done. It’s good to see that there actually may be some consensus, because I think that the province is looking for that.

Bill 14, though: We’ve already highlighted some of the weaknesses. I want to commend the member from Welland for touching on almost every piece of the bill that needs attention, everything from violence against women to the need for senior care to youth care.

But I just wanted to touch on the fact that co-ops truly are communities. What we’ve seen from the research and what we’ve seen from anecdotal stories from all of our ridings across the province is that people definitely feel supported in those settings. They feel supported because they know they’re not alone, and in today’s society, isolation is a growing issue. We have aging demographics; we have an aging population. I think that the vision for co-ops and this model of housing is the vision that we should be embracing for youth, for seniors and for families.

I want to do a special shout-out to the executive director of the YWCA in Kitchener-Waterloo. She rightly pointed out last week that the only way that we are going to lift women out of poverty and stabilize the lives of children in our communities is by building affordable, stable housing, and co-ops are definitely a part of that model. Certainly, we’ve seen over the years that shelters have seen more and more children. Shelters just aren’t

built or equipped to deal with children entering their doors, so let's stay focused on a true model that will bring equity and stability to our communities, and that is the co-op model.

I recently mentioned that I met with a local co-op group; there were some students at the table, and it was really refreshing. Students have that new voice, that new energy. I'd like to commend the Central Ontario Co-op Housing Federation, because every year they provide a co-op opportunity to go to camp—a student goes to camp; they learn leadership skills. They're focused on this very progressive model of housing, and they also provide a diversity scholarship for co-op youth attending a post-secondary institution. Co-ops are very much a part of the fabric of this province. While it's great that we're going to move this legislation forward, I think that we can be honest about the place that we are in in the province and that we can do better. We have some catching up to do when you look at the country as a whole.

One of the points that a student made that was so clear for me is that when you have a student co-op model, the students within that setting truly feel connected to the community. As they transition out of their public education experience into university, the research has been very clear: It's a time of stress, and it's a time of insecurity. We're seeing a lack of resiliency, if you will, from a mental health perspective. The student co-op housing movement needs to be a part of the vision. Wherever we go from this point forward, student co-op housing needs to be part of that equation.

Seniors, when you look at the demographics of this province—just last Friday, I was knocking on doors, meeting constituents and talking about our five-day home care guarantee. I was knocking on doors where these seniors should have been in a supportive housing model—a co-op model—where they wouldn't feel isolated, where they wouldn't feel disconnected, where health professionals could come into their housing and provide support, much like the model that we proposed around our five-day home care guarantee. Seniors deserve it. There has to be some dignity. There has to be some integrity at the end of their lives, when they've built the communities that they're living in. We have a responsibility to create that supportive-housing model around them.

Actually, it makes a lot of sense. It makes financial sense. You can argue the right and the wrong of this issue, the morality of the issue, but it actually makes economic sense. To my colleagues to the right, I make a financial statement: Early intervention, prevention, in a co-op housing model for seniors is the right way to go—for seniors, for students.

There are some ongoing issues, though, that we see in our current housing units. In KW we have nine co-ops. We have 1,129 units. Many of those units need maintenance; they need upkeep. The funding just hasn't been there, despite the best efforts of the members of those co-ops.

I was knocking on doors just recently. It adds to the sense of despair that people have when they're living in housing that is not reflective of the kind of lives that they want to live. Certainly, this is already a public investment. There's an investment in the capital of co-op housing, so let's take care of it and let's accelerate that funding so that we can actually maintain the housing that we've already built. Clearly, there's a need to improve and to grow the number of co-op units that we have, but there's also a responsibility to take care of the units that we have currently.

In Kitchener-Waterloo, in the absence of federal leadership, which is not supporting C-400—it makes no sense whatsoever. It doesn't make common sense; it doesn't make financial sense. It's disappointing that at the federal level, a progressive country like Canada does not have a national housing strategy. It makes it difficult for the province to actually work with that level of government when there's no vision, there's no integrity and there's no idea how a smart investment in housing will stabilize the economy, stabilize our communities, contribute to the safety of our communities.

It's disappointing, for sure, that C-400 did not get the support that it needed, but I have faith that one day it will happen, because we're not going to give up on housing. Housing is a major plank for our party and for the direction that we are going in.

I want to make a point around Kitchener-Waterloo: We have local champions. In the absence of federal leadership, the absence of provincial leadership, we have, in all of our communities—I'm sure you can point to activists and advocates for housing. In Kitchener-Waterloo, we have the Homelessness and Housing Umbrella Group. This is a group of people who are advocates, who have a lived experience of being homeless and who have a true understanding of how important the co-op model is to the integrity of their community and the safety of their community.

Finally, I just want to point one thing out: Because we haven't had leadership on the co-op housing issue, we actually have seniors living in three-bedroom co-op apartments. So we have seniors who are being over-housed, when families need that housing, because we have not developed co-op models for seniors—one-bedroom, single-person dwellings. We can do a lot more in this regard. So while I was disappointed that this order, this piece of legislation, died through prorogation—I hope that never happens again. Look at the conversations that we're going through; it's like Groundhog Day here, although I wasn't here for that, so now it sounds a little better.

I look forward to working on this portfolio. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your time and attention.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for London-Fanshawe.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'd like to contribute to the conversation on Bill 14. I want to commend the member from Welland. I always enjoy listening to her, and she did a great job in touching every point about co-op

housing and giving a good background and explanation on how those things can benefit our communities if we look at the option of having more co-op housing.

I wanted to touch base on the fact that since 1997 all forms of rental housing evictions have been moved out of the court system and put in the rental housing tribunal because that type of dispute goes through the Landlord and Tenant Board under the Residential Tenancies Act, and that's really where this belongs. Co-op is a little different than a private landlord-tenant relationship, but yet it's similar. Having a dispute between someone who owns the property and someone who lives in the property shouldn't be as cumbersome as going through courts. It shouldn't be that lengthy of a process. I mean, some of this can take up to three months. It's very stressful for the tenant, it's very stressful for the co-op and it's very costly for both parties. Oftentimes, tenants don't have those resources to have that dispute in the courts, and then it's unbalanced.

1650

Moving this bill, having this bill introduced and shifting to the Landlord and Tenant Board to deal with these disputes is a logical, balanced way of doing it, especially with the new amendment that we saw where tenants' fees for applications to file to the Landlord and Tenant Board are waived. As we said several times today, there are many low-income families and single parents in co-op housing, where that type of difference—paying for an application versus not paying for an application—makes it more feasible.

I know co-op groups have been fighting for this type of amendment since 2004. They want this type of dispute resolution process to go to the Landlord and Tenant Board so that budgets in a co-op complex can be forecasted.

I also met with a co-op group in London over the summer, or actually in September of last year when the House was prorogued, and that co-op board really articulated the concerns of budgeting and how they forecast budgeting when they can't control the costs of a tenant dispute in a co-op complex. One case was mentioned at one time that it cost almost \$50,000 for a particular case in a co-op complex to be resolved. So how can you plan your budget if that could even be an example that could come your way?

I know a lot of the co-ops wanted to use the money for repairs in their co-op. They wanted to make it better for the people who lived in the co-op. They didn't want to spend their time and their money in the courts fighting out tenant and landlord issues that could be sent to the proper venue of the Landlord and Tenant Board, where it can get easily resolved and where the expertise is. That's the other thing. Where we're fighting these types of things now in the courts, there is not the expertise. This is, I believe, one of the last areas that are still going to the courts rather than the Landlord and Tenant Board, where it should be.

So you have judges perhaps—we know they're very intelligent people—who maybe don't see this on a

regular basis and their expertise, perhaps, is a little rusty. So having that come out of the courts for economic reasons, for timelines for people and also expertise—landlord and tenant boards do this every day, and that's where these disputes belong.

We've talked about how healthy co-op complexes are in our communities. People who live in a group—you're going to have that friendship, you're going to know your neighbour because you are in close quarters. It is a much healthier, much more positive environment, and I think it's also great for families, because if I lived in a co-op and my son or my daughter was across the street playing with the neighbour, that's a much safer environment rather than maybe me driving, or them taking the bus to where their friends are and coming back. So they can just walk across the street—they've got a curfew—and they just trek back home. Those are healthy environments that we create when we have the co-op group effort, when people work together to make this a healthy environment for everyone.

The other thing that I wanted to mention is affordable housing, as the member from Welland mentioned. There isn't enough affordable housing, I think, in Ontario and probably in all of Canada. Affordable housing is really an essential survival piece of everyone's sense of well-being. If you don't have a home, Speaker, a lot of the other things start to unravel.

I know a few of my constituents who have been in dire straits, in shelters, and they did get a placement in affordable housing. What a world of difference that makes to their self-esteem, to their confidence, to their sense of peace, because they have a permanent home where they live. They're actually working in a precarious job. They don't have benefits; it's a part-time job. Affordable housing takes 30% of their income, which is huge because right now in London in a Cherryhill complex, in a seniors' complex—it's very well known in London, and there are many seniors who live there—there are seniors who are going to be protesting a 10% increase in their rent. One senior in the article has said he spends 75% of his income on housing, on rent.

Interjection: It's not sustainable.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: That is not sustainable. How can we expect people who are struggling on fixed incomes to stretch their dollars that far just to have a home?

Affordable housing is truly a key piece in our society so people can actually move on to bigger and better things. When you have that solid base, you have a roof over your head, you've got that stability, you can actually think about going back to school, upgrading your job and not having that worry of where your children are going to sleep and if you are going to have a roof over your heads for yourself and your family.

Speaker, I think this is a good bill and I'm glad it has been brought back to the House. I'm hoping that our time here is coming to an end shortly, that we do move this bill forward for the sake of the tenants living in co-op housing and for the sake of the co-op complexes, and making life easier for people who live there.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I'm very pleased to be able to speak on Bill 14 today. As you know, I represent Ottawa–Vanier. Ottawa–Vanier is downtown Ottawa, and I have many, many co-ops. I think that's the best model, because for people who live in co-op housing, it's like living in their own home—and I welcome the people from the co-op association here. I have many. I can tell you about Coop Voisins, which is close to the university campus; co-op Beausoleil; co-op Brebeuf, which is located in Lowertown; co-op Desloges; co-op de LaSalle—and I can go on and on and on. I think most of the co-ops in Ottawa are in my riding. That's the most beautiful model of affordable housing.

When I was a municipal councillor and we were planning a development and there was a co-op going into that area, there was no objection from anyone, because people knew that people were going to live in the co-op. They are proud of their housing, and they take part in the maintenance of the housing. They are also concerned about their neighbours. So it's a wonderful model, and I was always very supportive of this.

I'm glad about this bill and what it will do for those people who are on the boards of directors of the co-ops and those who are the tenants in the co-ops.

I'll be speaking later a bit more about my support for co-op housing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to add a few comments to the conversation today on Bill 14, the non-profit housing co-operatives bill. I would also like to welcome the representatives here today from the Co-operative Housing Federation, who have been here this afternoon to listen to this debate.

I have several co-op housing organizations in my riding of Whitby–Oshawa, and I have had the pleasure of meeting with representatives from the co-ops and with Mr. Harvey Cooper on a couple of occasions to talk about several of the issues that are of concern to them, primarily being the one that results in evictions being very difficult when you have to go through the courts. I certainly support the concept that there should be a more expedited way of doing that, to not have to go through the court process. Notwithstanding the fact that I'm a lawyer, I think it makes a lot of sense to have it moved into the landlord and tenant tribunal so that things can be dealt with, first of all, in a more expeditious manner. We all know that when matters go through the courts, it often takes years before issues are resolved, and when you're dealing with evictions or dealing with other issues that co-operative housing organizations have to deal with, they need to be dealt with in a more timely fashion.

Of course, there's also the issue of cost. It costs a lot to go to court these days, which is probably a subject we could address at another time. Justice is becoming increasingly unaffordable for people. At least in this

instance it provides a venue where these things can be dealt with in a cost-effective manner.

1700

I listened to the member from Welland, who was speaking about the need to have something in front of people who actually know this issue inside and out, so they can make good decisions around it.

So while there are things that we could probably talk about, some amendments that we would like to see in committee, I think it is something that we all can generally agree on. It is an issue that—it was prorogued before, but we need to deal with it now. It's timely and I think I would like to see it into committee as soon as possible.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? The member for Bramalea–Gore–Malton.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to touch on two points. I'd like to touch on access to justice, which has been raised a number of times, and also on the idea of co-operative housing.

On the access-to-justice piece, I think it's very important to recognize that access to justice is becoming more and more difficult for those who are less fortunate. Accessing court systems is quite complicated and quite expensive, and because of that, we need to find alternate methods which are more accessible and which are more cost-effective. I think a number of members in this House have raised this issue in solidarity or in agreement, and I think that's important to address. If we can find methods or means to provide people with access to a way of dealing with their disputes that does not require accessing courts—which are quite expensive and costly and take a lot of time—I think that's a very important initiative and I support that. I think we all agree on that, and this legislation looks like it will support that type of initiative.

In addition, and I think many people agree on this point, I want to add my voice in agreement that the co-operative housing model is an amazing way to address some of the affordable housing issues. It's not the only way. I think we need to have a multi-tier approach to affordable housing, but certainly co-operative housing can address those concerns in a very innovative and creative way, and I think it's working already in many communities. Many examples have been shared today of co-operative housing and how effective they have been at providing housing in a number of communities across Ontario. I think we need to support those initiatives any way that we can and look at other ways of ensuring that the people of Ontario have affordable housing, that it's not just a luxury or a privilege, but people should have a right to affordable housing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? The Minister of the Environment.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I heard the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton on the radio station CKTV this morning, and he was sounding much more moderate on the issue of auto

insurance than his leader, whom somebody has coached to have a more scolding and angry voice these days when making demands of the government. So I want to commend him on his reasonableness on radio this morning. I was disappointed that he didn't say that the NDP was going to bring in public auto insurance, because that was, of course, in the heart of NDP policy. But I digress from the topic at hand. I apologize for that, because the speeches were very good in the House so far on the issue of this particular bill.

Co-op housing in our part of the province, the Niagara Peninsula, is highly successful, as the member for Welland—I always want to change the name of the riding. I'll zero in on the member for Welland, who has said there are a number of developments in our part of the province which have been highly successful. The people involved are extremely proud, and should be, of the housing developments that are there, the co-op housing developments which allow people to own their own property but be part of a co-op and to have all the benefits that a co-op offers. I want to commend the leadership within these co-ops, because it is a responsibility that people must take on.

When Harvey Cooper has spoken and others have spoken here at Queen's Park when they have come to visit with us, they have been very compelling in their arguments for the need for this particular provision. I want to assure him and his group that, while I'm not supposed to say what happens in cabinet, I did not recall hearing a dissenting voice when this was brought forward for consideration.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): One of the New Democrats has two minutes to respond.

The member for Welland.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Thanks to the members from London—Fanshawe and Kitchener—Waterloo, the minister of community safety, corrections and francophone affairs, the member from Whitby—Oshawa, the members from Bramalea—Gore—Malton and St. Catharines, and the Minister of the Environment.

The Minister of the Environment talked about the successful projects that we've had in Niagara. I can tell you, having sat on the Niagara Regional Housing board for a number of years, that we have had some successful projects, but we could have had hundreds of successful projects had we actually had the money to move forward with them.

I can remember one expression of interest that went out probably in the last year that I sat on the board, where we had at least 100 applicants come forward. I think, at the end of the day, we moved forward with maybe six projects because that was all the money that was available. Certainly, the need is much greater than that.

But I want to reiterate and go back to the co-op piece. This has been a long time coming: 10 years since it was first brought forward by the co-op federation. I think the bill will actually improve speed, efficiency and fairness—all of those things—for tenants. It'll save money for tenants and co-ops and will also save money generally for taxpayers.

I say let's move this along and get it into committee. Everyone had an opportunity to actually speak to it when it was Bill 65, so hopefully we won't be at this for 20 hours, and we can get it into committee quickly and have the other discussions that we need to have there.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I'll be sharing my time on Bill 14 today with the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services, who is also the minister responsible for francophone affairs.

It's a pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 14, the Non-Profit Housing Co-operatives Statute Law Amendment Act, 2013. What I've heard of the discussion this afternoon around the chamber is that it is meeting with a degree of approval from all parties, I think. Some people are saying that it's long overdue; some people, in a sense, are saying that perhaps it goes a little too far; and some are saying it doesn't go far enough. So, chances are, that's a good indication that where it is at this point in time is just about right, and it should move forward. As a previous speaker stated, let's move this on through the committee process. Let's take another look at it, and then let's turn it into legislation.

It's interesting: In Canada we have a number of choices when it comes to the type of housing that we prefer. There are people that have and always will prefer to own a home outright, and they can go from luxury homes to those of modest incomes. Some people prefer to rent all their lives. Some people prefer to lease. And for some people, one of the options that has been available to us now for some time as a society is that of being a member in a co-operative housing—"project" wouldn't be the word—a co-operative housing community.

Over the years, I think it has proven—certainly in the town of Oakville, and from what I've heard from other people who have spoken in the chamber today, the success of co-ops in their own community is something that I think we should all be proud of. Oakville is no exception to that. There's a number of co-operative housing ventures in Oakville that are a part of the community. They've been a part of the community for some time, and provide an option in housing that a lot of people find very, very attractive.

What's being proposed today under Bill 14 is a way to make a system of housing that we think is very good better and to improve upon it. As I said, there are people who think perhaps we could make more improvements or less, but this seems to me to be a balanced approach that's going to bring certainly a lot more efficiency and accountability to the process—accessibility, transparency, the things that we would like to see in any process or any piece of legislation that's passed in this House.

What it does specifically, is it allows for the option—and it amends the Residential Tenancies Act and the Co-operative Corporations Act. It will allow the movement of most co-op disputes to the Landlord and Tenant Board. What that means is that it won't have to go through the expensive route of going through the courts.

It also would allow for the added benefit to co-op members of being able to access mediation services along the way to perhaps even try to resolve any issues that arise along the way without even having to resort to the Landlord and Tenant Board or to the courts themselves.

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If you take it out of the co-operative setting, it's got the added benefit of allowing our overburdened court system to spend its time on something else. So it unplugs the system, not only to the benefit of those people who are members of a co-op, but it helps the justice system too. It allows the justice system to do more with less time, obviously.

Some examples of resolutions of disputes that would now be able to be dealt with by the LBT, or the Landlord and Tenant Board, would be such things as arrears, persistent late payment of rent, illegal behaviour of any kind, interfering with reasonable enjoyment of the co-operative and of course wilful damage, which is something that I think nobody wants to see but obviously is a problem—an issue that does arise from time to time—that can now be dealt with by the LTB. It can be sent to the LTB instead of through the court system.

Those issues that can't be provided for under the Residential Tenancies Act will still have the option to go through the courts. So it's not like we're replacing one option with the other; what we're doing is giving increased flexibility by passing this.

The reaction I'm aware of from stakeholders on this issue is quite positive. Everybody, I think, supports the program—everyone I've seen. CMHC, the Ontario Co-operative Association, the opposition parties, the government—I understand there's an awful lot of support for this at the staff level—the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario: Everybody seems to be in support of this move taking place.

Some previous speakers have outlined the amount of time it has taken us to get to this point, and I think there's some validity to that criticism. But it seems that now that we have this on the floor—we've got three parties in some rough agreement on this—the wisdom of those advising that we should allow this to move forward, I think, is the opinion we should be favouring.

I'm quite excited about this, and I know that some people have been supporting this for quite some time and have been advising us that we should move forward with this. Some people are saying that 2003-04 is when the journey to this began, when the advice started to come from the co-operatives themselves that there was a better way of doing this. It's probably taken more time than it should have to reach this point, but I don't think that should be a reason at all for us stopping now. I think now is the time to move forward.

We've had this before us in the past on a number of occasions from a number of parties. We've had private members' bills approximating this, and now I think we're actually in the position where it's time to move this forward through second reading, on to third reading and

then on to royal assent. I think the furthest it's got in the past is second reading—the same bill under a different number, Bill 65, I think was mentioned in the past.

I think that any time we can take advantage of where we can make something that is working well work better, we as legislators should seize that opportunity. That's what this allows us to do here. The co-operatives, those people who are most knowledgeable about the co-operative housing movement themselves, understand the important role that co-operative housing plays in an overall affordable housing policy for the province of Ontario. The advice they're giving us is that by passing Bill 14 we'll be strengthening the underpinnings, the foundation, of the co-operative housing movement, and that can't help but be a good thing. I think it lays a foundation that is going to solidify these organizations and allow them to continue to provide the housing options they have in the past.

Stakeholder support is high, as I've said, and the proposals that are being brought forward, I think, are very sensible, very well thought out; they're process-oriented in a lot of ways. I think it really is time to just let this happen, just allow it to happen, give it the support of the House, allow it to move to the committee stage. If there are any suggestions coming from the opposition parties, or indeed the government, in the form of amendments at that point in time, that would be the time and place to allow that to happen. There's nothing wrong with making a good bill a better bill. I think the people in Ontario are expecting us as a Legislature to work together, to bring our best to this place, to listen to each other. We have the owl and the eagle on either side sort of looking at us here, which is a sign that we should be listening to each other; we should be learning from each other.

This, I think, is probably the sort of bill that is needed right now, given the friction in the House over the past year or so and the almost inability of the House to function in a minority situation. I think it's kind of refreshing to see a bill come forward that's got support from all three parties, that allows us to work together. That's what Ontarians are really hoping that we're able to do on a number of bills. This, I think, gives us the opportunity to show to the people of Ontario that we do have the ability to work together when a bill is brought forward in a form that the opposition parties find is something they can be supportive of, something that they can pass comment on, something that they can perhaps suggest amendments to or improve upon. That is the way that people in the province of Ontario, from all political stripes, envision this place operating.

As I said, Speaker, I'm sharing my time with the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services, who's also the minister responsible for francophone affairs. I'll sit down now, but I just wanted to encourage all members of the House who are present and those who may be listening on TV: Those members of the public should have a level of confidence that this is a well-thought-out piece of legislation that's going to mean nothing but good things for the co-operative housing

movement in the future and allow the people who are co-operative members to be able to facilitate any sort of discussions they have in the future or disputes they have in the future in a better way, in a more transparent way, and that can't help but be a good thing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm pleased to recognize the Minister of Community Safety.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Merci beaucoup, monsieur le Président. Thank you very much. Again, I welcome the people from the co-op organizations here today. I think that our paths cross often, because I've been to many of these 20th anniversaries, 30th anniversaries, 10th anniversaries of the co-ops in my riding, and it's always a pleasure.

It's a pleasure to have so many co-ops in my riding because for me, that's the best model of affordable housing in a community. As I said previously, when there is a co-op project which is going up in one part of my riding, you never hear anything. The neighbours are happy because they know that they will act as owners. Everybody takes much pride in their property—and it's a good model also for those who want to buy their own house later on. They can save money because it's not as expensive, and most of them pay according to their income, so it's kind of a transition, a stepping stone for something else. Others much prefer to stay there—they know their neighbours—and there are rarely vacant units. The list of people waiting to go into co-op housing, their applications, is always very long.

Like I said, this bill, Bill 14, is very much needed. If passed, it will allow co-operative boards to apply to the Landlord and Tenant Board to resolve tenure disputes that are currently provided for under the Residential Tenancies Act. I know that everywhere I went, the board or the provincial association were asking me for that, because it's too expensive. It's expensive for the board and it's expensive also to those tenants there because they have to go to the court. Sometimes they cannot, so they just accept what the board is saying; or the board will tolerate someone who does not pay their rent or whatever because it's too expensive to go to the court to have this person expelled from the co-op.

Mr. Speaker, in Ontario, there are approximately 125,000 people who live in co-op housing. I was surprised to see that there were just 125,000. We should have more, and we should encourage you to encourage the co-ops in your riding to apply and look at other pieces of land to build these projects.

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In addition, if Bill 14 is passed, the proposed legislation will allow the Landlord and Tenant Board to waive or defer the fees, if charged, in specific circumstances and in accordance with its rules. That's another good addition, because some of them cannot afford it. They just have their money to pay for the rent, so taking the money to apply—it's often less that they will put on their food bill that week or that month. So I welcome this addition.

I just wanted to speak about some co-ops in my riding and to show how great the program is working. For

instance, I'm talking about the Co-op Beausoleil, which has been there for quite a long time. They finished paying the mortgage on the co-op, so they were able to borrow the money to renovate all the units. They put in new kitchens; they put in new windows, and they do improve.

Why is this so wonderful? It's because the co-op is administered by occupants of the co-op. They know the needs, they knew that they wanted to improve it, and they know that for quality of life, a lot depends on the state of their units. Also, they have pride in their co-op and they don't want the co-op to deteriorate.

A good friend of mine and a great supporter, Maurice Pagé, has been living there since day one and has been the manager there for a long time; he is still involved.

Through that, they were able to get involved in building a health unit close by. So, as you can see, they are building their own community. They started with the co-op, and now they're building their own community. They're very much involved with Le Patro, which is right next door. They sit on the board of Le Patro. One of the brothers of the Patro also lives in the co-op. So it's a very nice community model.

I hope that everybody in this room will be supporting. At the beginning of the afternoon, I thought that we were all on the same page. I suggest that we may move third reading this afternoon so that there will be no danger—if the government does not last too long, at least this bill—

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Do you know something we don't know, Madame?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: We don't wish. But as you know, in a minority government, you never know.

Don't you agree with me? You will be supportive this afternoon, at a quarter to 6, when the minister will get up and say, "I move third reading of this bill"?

There's nothing contentious in it. I know that some may be hesitant because of the waiving of the charge. I know that sometimes, some people will take advantage of the fact that they don't have to pay when they want to challenge the board of the co-op. But in a perfect world, we have to give some and we get some back.

I am very much in favour. As the member of the third party from—where?

Interjection: Bramalea—Gore—Malton.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: —Bramalea—Gore—Malton was saying, this is one of the multi-tier approaches to social housing. I know that co-ops do not fit—are not proper for everyone, because in every downtown we have all sorts of social housing. That's a very good one, but for some reason, for those who need other supports, it may not be the right model.

But for the majority—we have a co-op with a lot of students close to the university. La Coop Voisins has a lot of university students who live there. As you all remember, when you were at university you didn't have much money, but the students are there helping their neighbours in the co-op. Some are helping with income tax; some are helping with babysitting; some are helping with activities.

There are some other co-ops where most of the people there are now retired and are seniors, but there are young families coming in because it's often the only place where you have units that have three bedrooms or four bedrooms. Especially for newcomers, who often have larger families, they need a three- or four-bedroom unit, and often that's the only place that they can find the proper housing for them.

I hope that we will not defer this too long and that we will all support the bill put forward by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, and we will help all our friends who live in co-ops and we will help all my constituents in Ottawa–Vanier who also are on the boards of co-ops or live in co-ops. Thank you for being here today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jim McDonell: It's an honour to rise to respond to the discussion by the member from Oakville and the Minister of Community Safety.

When we look back, this bill was first introduced early enough last year by the then Minister of Municipal Affairs, now the Premier, Kathleen Wynne. We talk about the importance in moving the disagreements or the challenges out of the courts. As I think my honourable colleague mentioned, millions of dollars are spent every year. The prorogation has been a waste of the effort. It's costing the residents of the co-op much money that needs to be looked at—and our courts. We have a backlog in courts.

I'd like to talk about one of the success stories of my riding with the Brookdale tenants' association, whom I met with on February 6. This is a co-operative that paid off their mortgage a number of years ago and they've been able to reward or have been able to give their tenants a very low income. The success is so great that the members are now becoming older and looking at ways of keeping them or allowing them to stay there by looking at some renovations that would allow them to add handicapped washrooms and utilities. It speaks to just how successful the program has been and how we should look at this co-op program as being a great alternative for many areas. Unfortunately, we have very limited facilities in Cornwall, in my riding, but it would be a great initiative to expand that.

The residents are very happy. You look at the volunteer time they put in to make the situation work, the improvements they've done over the years. It's a great organization and I wanted to commend them, in my short two minutes, for the work they've done in the past and the work they are looking to do in the future to make it an even better place and provide more services for the residents. So thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's my pleasure to rise and address this measure. I want to say to the representatives of the co-op housing movement here today that, in part, this is a story straight out of Greek mythology. Sisyphus

continues to roll the boulder towards the brow of the hill. It is our hope that, at this try, you actually get it to the top of the hill.

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Minister Meilleur was perhaps being very subtle in suggesting that we expedite the passage of this bill, given the unpredictability of government in these times, and certainly the unpredictability we have seen in the last six months.

Speaker, we've debated the substance of this bill in the past. We know that non-profit housing co-operatives provide good-quality, democratically controlled housing for residents. Housing is a critical need across this province. Making sure that housing is affordable by eliminating costly and unnecessary steps, giving co-op housing members the benefit of access to a lower-cost tribunal—landlord-tenant bureau—makes a lot of sense, Mr. Speaker.

The co-op housing movement has done tremendous work to try and ensure that people have a foundation in their lives for stability, for growth, for success, and this very small step for the province as a whole is of material assistance to those who live in co-op housing.

I agree with the minister. Let's get on with this debate. Let's get through to committee. Let's expedite this process so that this Sisyphean task will come to an end. There will be success and, frankly, savings of money for everyone all around in this society.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm very pleased to be here and given an opportunity to speak in support of Bill 14. Like the previous speakers, my colleague from Oakville and the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services—it is very clear from all the speakers this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, there is clear support of this bill and what the intent of this bill is.

Just this past Friday I met with the Bridletowne co-op members in my riding of Scarborough–Aldoncourt, and they urged each one of us—the 105 of us—to expedite this bill because, as we heard this afternoon, there is interest, but more than just interest; there is an urgent need to move this bill along. We have heard from the opposition parties, Mr. Speaker, and given it's a minority government, the opposition colleagues of ours have all indicated express interest that we should move this debate forward to go to committee, so that they can tinker with it and hopefully bring the bill back to the House for a final vote.

The other piece here, Mr. Speaker, is, if the intent of everybody in this House is to move this along, let's not delay the discussion in committee. Let's not move this from the process of debate in the House and continue debate in committee, because, at the end of the day, the intent is to pass it before too long, and at the same time, to support the co-op community because they have asked us numerous times to expedite the process of disputes.

So let's not continue more debate; the debate is here, but more importantly, when we go to committee, let's not

delay the whole conversation and tease out more clause by clause and drag this out in committee, because we want to pass this bill.

I want to thank the co-op community and say thank you for your leadership, but also recognize the minister for her continuous work on this file. At the end of the day, this is where the leadership is at.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We have time for one last question and comment, and I look to the member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound.

Mr. Bill Walker: Thank you, Speaker. It's my pleasure to comment. I have to say that I agree with my colleague from Toronto—Danforth; it does seem like a pretty big boulder at the bottom of the hill going straight up, considering that this Liberal government said in 2007 that they wanted to make this happen. I've heard, "Let's not delay," "Let's not talk," "Let's not add a whole bunch of bureaucracy." I think you maybe just need to look in the mirror and go backwards a little bit. Most of the times when we stand in the House that's what we are asking for: Let's get rid of the bureaucracy, let's get rid of the waste of administration, let's stop the rhetoric and the words, let's put action on the table and move forward.

The Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services—it might have been a Freudian slip; I was trying to get the Minister of Energy's attention to see if he was going to bring his paper down to see if there was some truth to that, that there may be a prorogation in sight again. Let's hope not. We just got back to work.

The hope is, and the co-op folks here today—on their behalf, I hope truly that we can move this forward. They do great work; it's a great service. But I think any time we introduce this legislation—I said it in my earlier comments—we need to do it with balance. We need to do it so that each side has an ability to have input; so that when we put legislation forward, it's efficient, it's timely and it's serving the true people who are actually going to take benefit from this.

We will be supporting, from my perspective, this bill. We do want to see some province-wide hearings to ensure that there is, in fact, an ability to amend some of these before they go forward so that people are actually getting the service they need at the end of the day.

It's great to say all the right buzzwords. But at the end of the day—2007 and we're still not seeing this bill enforced and implemented. You can say all you want about me talking, but at the end of the day, you're the government, you've had the ability to implement and you have not got the job done.

My hope is that we will have discussion in committee, we will move it forward quickly and we will get this through before, once again, the government prorogues and takes all of those great bills off the table like they did last fall.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments.

I return to the member for Oakville, who has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Once again, it is a pleasure to respond to those members who expressed an opinion on the comments that were given: the Minister of Community Safety; the member from Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound; the members from Toronto—Danforth, Scarborough—Agincourt and Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry.

Based on the comments I've heard all afternoon, and based on the most recent comments, I have a sense that Bill 14 is going to move forward. I think that there's some level of unanimity that it should move forward. I'm not sure I agree with the member from Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound that we want to hurry up and have province-wide hearings; I think we want to hurry up and get this bill passed. I think it has taken 10 years for us to get this far.

I come from a community that has a great community in that community of Oakville, and it's called Glen Abbey. There's a famous golf course there; the Canadian Opens are held there—a beautiful golf course. Glen Abbey has a range of housing, from quite affordable housing to quite expensive housing. But what a lot of people don't know is that when the community was first forming in the 1980s, one of the very first buildings that took place in the community of Glen Abbey was actually a co-operative housing organization. When the community was very, very young and the homes were just being built and people were just starting to get to know each other as neighbours, they actually used the community centre for the co-op housing as a meeting place. It was a place that drew people together, and I think—obviously, it's part of the name: co-operative housing—it allows people to co-operate with each other in a co-operative way.

I'm hoping that as a result of the co-operation that we've seen here today, this piece of legislation is going to go through at a fairly rapid rate, is going to receive royal assent and is going to allow these organizations to avail themselves fully of the benefits that are contained in this bill.

My thanks to the other speakers for their support for this initiative.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's a pleasure to rise and join the debate here today on the Non-Profit Housing Co-operatives Statute—Bill 14. I want to also commend the people here today representing the Co-operative Housing Federation. They're very patient. They have stayed with us all afternoon, and that's to be commended. That doesn't always happen. That's Mr. Harvey Cooper, Dale Reagan, Diane Miles and Judy Shaw and all the people they represent across this great province. I appreciate their time and effort in being here today.

I also want to commend, first of all, my colleague the critic of municipal affairs and housing and the member for Leeds—Grenville for his very insightful comments leading off this debate today, and also all of the debate that took place here today from all three parties. I listened

quite intently to the biggest share of it, and it was very interesting.

I know that this bill, in its previous iteration, was one of the 109 bills that the former Premier, the member for Ottawa South, deemed unnecessary when the prorogation of the Legislature took place. I hope for the sake of the new Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing that the debate is not interrupted again by any prorogation of the House.

Co-op housing is an important option for residents in our province who need access to affordable housing. Whether it is an effect of skyrocketing home prices in the GTA, or the lack of job creation and economic growth in Ontario during the last decade of the McGuinty–Wynne government, increasingly families are having difficulty finding housing options that they can afford.

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As an affordable housing option, housing co-operatives are not-for-profit organizations in which members do not own equity in their residence, but agree to be active members of that co-op community. In return, residents are expected to participate in the regular administration and maintenance of this community. If residents move, their home is returned to the co-op to be offered to another individual or family who needs an affordable home.

Some co-op members pay reduced monthly rent that's based on their income, with the government funding the difference. Because these co-ops are non-profit, co-ops charge members only enough to recover the cost of repairs, as well as ensuring that they can sustain a reserve of some funds. The result is that they provide housing that can be more affordable, which is why we need to champion them as a very important part of Ontario's affordable housing strategy.

Further, co-ops are democratic organizations that are controlled by their own members. Every member has a vote in decisions about their housing, including electing that co-op's board of directors. Each housing co-operative is a legal organization incorporated as a co-op.

The Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada states that there are currently more than 550 non-profit housing co-operatives in the province, which add up to a total of almost 44,000 households in which more than 125,000 people live. I think it's important to reiterate the fact that there is co-operative housing in 95 of Ontario's 107 ridings, so it's very important. It affects 90% of the MPPs in this place and also all of their residents and constituents. So co-ops provide a very valuable mix in our communities.

To be local a little bit—as Tip O'Neill from Congress used to say, “All politics is local”—in my riding of Sarnia–Lambton, as a housing option, co-op housing makes up a small but very important percentage of residential units in that community. In total, we have four co-op apartment arrangements in Sarnia. We have the Alexander MacKenzie Housing Co-operative; Hoskins Housing Co-operative; Faethorne Place Housing Co-operative; and St. Clair Meadows Housing Co-operative.

Together, these four co-ops have about 200 units that help to meet the geared-to-income needs of families in my community.

The need for affordable housing continues to be high to this day in my community. Currently—I just spoke to the manager as early as this morning in Sarnia–Lambton—there are at least 450 families in Sarnia–Lambton on a waiting list for affordable housing. This means, regrettably, that most families in need of affordable housing wait about two years to find places to live that they can afford. If, as a by-product of this bill, those families will have a better chance of finding affordable housing sooner, then along with my colleagues in the PC caucus, I want to see this bill move into committee so it can be fully reviewed.

In speaking with my colleague the critic for municipal affairs and housing, I've learned that the changes that this bill proposes would remove those 300 co-op dispute cases that are currently dealt with in the Ontario court system. As we all know—anyone who has a constituency office—you hear from all your constituents about the issues around Family Court and other court systems. Co-ops being allowed to be dealt with like this would be like many other residential disputes.

The current system, with costly legal wrangling in courts, costs people outrageous amounts of money. Having a standardized dispute resolution with the Landlord and Tenant Act would certainly be a step in the right direction for the co-op community.

Our critic for municipal affairs also tells me that Bill 14 makes some minor amendments to the Energy Consumer Protection Act, 2010, and Ontario Clean Energy Benefit Act, 2010. But the primary purpose of the bill is to move most co-op tenure disputes out of the courts and put them before the Landlord and Tenant Board.

Speaker, this is a reasonable adjustment and again begs the question: Why has it taken this government so long to be able to put this bill forward?

The inner workings of this bill set up a process by which a non-profit housing co-op can make application to the Landlord and Tenant Board to terminate a former member's occupancy and ultimately evict that former member. This could be an important tool for the co-op community.

These provisions under part V of the Residential Tenancies Act are the same that any landlord in the province would use to evict a tenant. A co-operative at this date has two avenues to terminate a member's occupancy. As with other landlords, the co-operative can issue a notice when it is pursuing an eviction under one or more of the 11 instances set out in the Residential Tenancies Act. These include nonpayment of rent, committing illegal acts or causing wilful damage to the property.

Mr. Speaker, in Sarnia–Lambton, which I am more familiar with, I said there were nearly 500 families waiting for geared-to-income housing. Having units tied up in unnecessary prolonged court disputes is keeping

those families on the waiting list for affordable housing for an undue time instead of in a good home.

This new process would also allow the co-operative to pursue an eviction in the Landlord and Tenant Board without notice in some very limited circumstances. They include:

—where a former co-op member has either terminated his or her membership and therefore their occupancy rights;

—where the member's occupancy rights have expired by virtue of a predetermined date; and

—where the former member is a post-secondary student in a student housing co-operative.

These are very straightforward circumstances which, under the existing system, would have required that the co-op head to court to complete what really amounts to routine paperwork. Under this bill they will be able to get these situations resolved by applying directly to the Landlord and Tenant Board.

We should note that this legislation does not entirely remove the role of the courts in the dispute resolution process. There will remain, of course, some tenure disputes that will continue to go before the courts which are not spelled out under the Residential Tenancies Act. These deal with specific bylaws to individual co-ops, and they include provisions like the no-pet rule violation and also failure by the member to undertake certain members' duties, like, say, snow removal or lawn care.

These disputes that can't be resolved by the board itself or the co-op still would ultimately have to be adjudicated by our provincial courts. Bill 14, however, adds a new section to the Co-operative Corporations Act to ensure that these cases will be judged on the merits of the case. In other words, procedural irregularities will no longer be able to trump the basis upon which a co-op board has decided to revoke a person's membership. This is important, Mr. Speaker, because it ensures the wishes of the co-op board, which, after all, represents the members of the co-op.

It's easy to see how this provision will ensure these hearings don't get bogged down in procedure wrangling and stay focused on the issue at hand.

Bill 14 also changes the co-op act in a number of ways to streamline the internal dispute resolution process used by individual housing co-operatives. Co-ops have functioned very well under these democratic rules for years, and it is essential that they retain the ability to do so regardless of the amendments outlined in Bill 14.

We also should note that while respecting this well-established internal dispute resolution process, Bill 14 does not allow individual members to make application to the Landlord and Tenant Board. Disputes that co-op residents may have with the housing provider regarding issues over charges or maintenance will continue to use the internal process. That's the right decision because there's no need to further encumber the Landlord and Tenant Board with these disputes when a very sound process is already in place within each co-op in the province.

Proponents of this legislation have said that it will streamline the dispute process to make it faster, more efficient, more cost-effective and more transparent for both co-ops and their members, and we can all applaud that.

As such, the Ontario PC caucus welcomes the opportunity to send Bill 14 to committee to consult with Ontario's co-op community about this legislation and its primary function of taking most co-op disputes away from the courts and moving them to the Landlord and Tenant Board. The Ontario Progressive Conservatives have long supported amending the Co-operative Corporations Act and also the Residential Tenancies Act in a way that would allow for this new process. We've done so for some very good reasons. First, as I have said already, Ontario's courts are already clogged, and it simply doesn't need the additional burden posed by having its dockets filled with this type of civil matter. Our court system has enough trouble already, and anything we can do to reduce the number of cases in that system should be welcomed.

Beyond reducing clutter in the courts, I think we can all agree that that's not really the appropriate place for a landlord and tenant dispute over tenure. After all, when any landlord in the province is dealing with an eviction or other dispute, they follow well-established Landlord and Tenant Board processes. It only makes sense for non-profit housing co-operatives to do the same, but they can't do this under the existing legislation because co-op accommodations are governed by the Co-operative Corporations Act rather than the Residential Tenancies Act.

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In welcoming this move to the Landlord and Tenant Board, I want to stress very clearly that I know there are some serious problems with the Landlord and Tenant Board. Both landlords and tenants aren't happy with the way the board currently operates, but regardless of those problems, I think we would agree that Ontario's courts are not the venue to resolve disputes between co-ops and their members. We know it takes too long, and the costs are much too high to continue using that eviction process.

My colleague the member for Leeds-Grenville tells me that, annually, there are some 300 co-op disputes before the courts every year; it's estimated that these cases saddle co-op members with an annual legal bill of approximately \$1 million. These cases typically cost between \$3,000 and \$5,000 to resolve. However, in some cases, a single case could be up to \$50,000, and those figures don't take into account the tremendous amount of time that both parties are involved with, in terms of paperwork, to resolve this dispute in our already-overburdened court system.

Again, it's unfortunate that the government has taken so long to finally get this moving. Using the figures provided by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the five-year wait seems to mean that some \$5 million are spent on legal costs to resolve these co-op tenure disputes through the courts. It would have been

nice to have some action on the file earlier—something that I think all three parties would agree with—so that that \$5 million could have been saved and spent on housing itself.

In conclusion, I will be supporting Bill 14 today at second reading. I believe it is important that this bill receive a thorough review at committee, where we can have members of the co-op community from across this great province—including those in Sarnia–Lambton, my community—come in and work with the committee to create the best system possible for the co-op community and the people of Ontario. With this important committee work, hopefully co-op housing can remain an important component within Ontario's housing and residential mix. And hopefully, as a Legislature, we can focus our time on finding more solutions to get these people into affordable housing and off those wait-lists that are far too long.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. Bill Walker: It's my pleasure to address this. I think my colleague has done a great job. He's brought out the fact that we need to get these situations out of the courts, so that they can continue on with more pressing needs. I think he's very much highlighted the great work that the co-ops provide to our communities, and I think he's also pointed out that we need to get to committee and get this done in an expeditious manner.

What we need to do is to ensure that both sides in these cases have the ability to come forward and have their sides heard. We need to make sure that we listen and actually engage both sides of the party, so that we have very good, effective and timely legislation in place when it is finally passed.

I think Bob has really articulated well that there's an ability here and a willingness for our PC caucus to work with the other side to ensure that this gets through, finally; I think this is the third or fourth time now. Because of a number of prorogations, it hasn't made it there, and we need to make sure that it does, as quickly as we can, so that it helps those people in the co-op housing.

In my community, there's certainly lots of need, people that could benefit from this housing. I think that Bob made a comment in regard to \$5 million spent on court costs. That could have gone to the front lines. That could have provided more people with this type of housing that is so urgently needed by them. I think, at the end of the day, what we continually bring to the table is, let's make sure with these types of bills, when they come to the table, that we're all coming leaving our partisan hats at home. Let's ensure that we're thinking of the end user. Let's make sure they're fair, they're timely, and that we put the legislation in place that truly gives both sides their day in court, and that we keep them out of the courts needlessly so that those courts can spend their time on much more urgent matters that probably are, again, getting backlogged because of some of these. It needs to be fair, it needs to be very well-decided by each side that

they had their day in court and they had good input. Then, let's enact the legislation. Let's pass it and move it forward as quickly as possible.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to this, three times now today, Speaker, and let's hope that we can actually get this big ball up the hill and over before this legislation is prorogued again.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I think this is a very positive sign in the Legislature today. All sides of the House are sounding very positive, very cordial and very cooperative. I hope this type of feeling, this kind of atmosphere continues, moving forward, and we can see eye to eye on other issues as well. I think we all see the benefit of helping out co-operatives. I think they're a wonderful institution, a wonderful way of organizing, and I think we all agree.

The next step now is: What can we do to work together to make sure this bill does become enacted? Some of the earlier suggestions that, given the volatile nature of a minority government, though we all want to work together and be co-operative, sometimes there may be differences which cannot be settled, so maybe we need to look at expediting this bill and getting it passed sooner rather than later.

Again, I want to stress one of the points that I didn't get to touch on enough in my last opportunity to speak on this piece of legislation: that more and more we're seeing the cost of litigation increasing, and so providing the cost-effective mechanism of a tribunal is a great idea. I think that we need to do more than just address, in this instance, co-operative housing; in many areas of the law, there needs to be a more cost-effective mechanism so that people don't have to resort to litigation and don't have to resort to courts in order to access justice. I think that we're seeing a trend that many people are being denied access to legal aid, that the funding for legal aid is being cut and needs to be bolstered. As an alternative, we need to find other ways of ensuring that people have access to justice in this province. Providing co-operatives with an access to tribunals is one way, but we need to work on others as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Phil McNeely: This sounds like very co-operative legislation that we're going through, and I don't think I can add any more to the support this bill has had today.

Co-operative housing is not only for the lower incomes; co-operative housing is for everyone. I just think that with what's happening in Ottawa–Orléans now—we're going to be losing 15,500 jobs; the federal government is moving from 50,000 to 70,000 people from east of Bank Street out to west of Bank Street. So I will want to talk to the people who do a lot of co-operative housing, because we're going to need a lot of help in Orléans by the time the Baird gang is finished. But it's something

I'm working on with many people, and we may be able to do it.

It's a real privilege for me to stand up here today and support such good legislation and see something that is working. It's working because the legislation is going to be changed so that the people who own in co-operatives are able to deal with those people who break the rules, cause vandalism and don't pay their share. So that is going to make the bill a lot better, but I am going to think about it—and the unbalanced approach the city of Ottawa has taken in Ottawa; the east end right down to Prescott and Russell—Ottawa–Vanier is losing 4,000 jobs; we're losing 15,500 jobs; Prescott and Russell are losing 2,300 jobs—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? We'll return to the member for Sarnia–Lambton.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I know my time is limited. I'd like to first thank the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen

Sound for his comments, and the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton and my colleague from Ottawa–Orléans.

Yes, we won't belabour the point. We do all agree that we need to see something done in co-operative housing. I know that Bill 65 was the bill that they originally wanted, but now we've got Bill 14, so let's move forward. My colleague from Bramalea–Gore–Malton talked about the delays and how this might be better to go to something like tribunals; I think it's true. The old story: Justice delayed is justice denied. So those people who do go forward for those eviction notices or whatever—we need to get those disputes resolved as quickly and painlessly as possible. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. It being 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1759.

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No. 9



Nº 9

ISSN 1180-2987

**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

Second Session, 40th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Deuxième session, 40^e législature



**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Tuesday 5 March 2013

Mardi 5 mars 2013

**Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac**

**Président
L'honorable Dave Levac**

**Clerk
Deborah Deller**

**Greffière
Deborah Deller**

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Hansard Reporting and Interpretation Services
Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Service du Journal des débats et d'interprétation
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 5 March 2013

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 5 mars 2013

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

AMBULANCE AMENDMENT ACT (AIR AMBULANCES), 2013

LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES AMBULANCES (SERVICES D'AMBULANCE AÉRIENS)

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 28, 2013, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 11, An Act to amend the Ambulance Act with respect to air ambulance services / Projet de loi 11, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les ambulances en ce qui concerne les services d'ambulance aériens.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate?

Mr. Frank Klees: I'm pleased to engage in this debate, notwithstanding the disappointment that we have in the content of this bill.

The Ornge air ambulance scandal is a textbook example of why people are cynical about politics, about politicians, about bureaucrats and the role of the private sector in delivering public services. In this one file, we have seen how a well-intentioned plan to divest the delivery of an essential health care service to an external non-profit corporation has resulted in the waste of millions of scarce health care dollars, put patients at risk, compromised the ability of dedicated front-line health care providers to carry out their responsibilities, undermined the viability of long-standing service providers and, frankly, ruined the lives of numerous individuals who got caught up in the vortex of this scandal.

Speaker, what concerns me most is that, after some 15 days over months of public hearings, some 57 witnesses and thousands of pages of documentary evidence which makes it clear that the very structure of Ornge is dysfunctional, that it lacks the professional aviation expertise at the most senior levels of the organization to manage and oversee an air ambulance operation and that there has been a serious failure on the part of the Ministry of Health to exercise oversight responsibilities, none of those issues are being addressed by this government.

Rather, what we have here in Bill 11 is a further attempt by this government to divert attention from its

failure to oversee this essential part of our health care service, to divert attention from the failure of this minister, the deputy minister and numerous bureaucrats who had clearly defined oversight responsibilities—from doing their job. To this point, no one has been held accountable—no one in this government. In fact, the minister responsible for oversight, who failed miserably, has now been promoted to the position of Deputy Premier. The deputy minister, Mr. Saïd Rafi, who had responsibility on the implementation side, got a raise.

I want to ask this question to the Premier, the new Premier, who has committed to doing things differently, to being accountable: How does she justify that not one individual in this government has been held accountable for their gross mismanagement and that, in fact, individuals within the ministry continue to go unscathed; no consequences for this lack of oversight?

Now we have before us Bill 11, resurrected from the death of Bill 50. Despite the fact that the minister had the benefit of extensive debate and input on Bill 50, the predecessor of Bill 11, and despite the fact that the opposition members provided some very clear observations about the failure of Bill 50 to address the issues of the lack of oversight and accountability, none of those changes were incorporated into Bill 11—none of them.

What does that tell us? It tells us that this government is either blind to the problems at Ornge, or they simply refuse to see them, or they're complicit—one of the three. And the more I observe this government, the more I have to conclude that they're complicit. What is it about this government that they fail to see?

I want to talk about the issue of accountability. Speaker, when Bill 50 was debated, we pointed out, as did members of the third party, that the accountability issues have not been addressed. The issue of whistle-blower protection was simply papered over. It's referenced but it has no substance.

At that time, during that debate, we called for transparency and for accountability, and we said to the government, "Look, if you're serious about wanting accountability"—and it's very clear that the government failed in its oversight responsibilities—"then let's give oversight responsibilities and authority to the Ombudsman so that at the very least, if the minister fails, if the deputy minister fails in oversight, we have an independent officer of this Legislature who can bring to the attention of Parliament what is really going on." When I first looked at Bill 11, I thought that would be the first change, the first amendment to this original Bill 50 that we would see, but it's not there. Someone else noticed that it's not there, and it happens to be the Ombudsman.

Speaker, I'm going to read into the record the Ombudsman's letter that is addressed to the Honourable Deb Matthews, dated March 1. The reason I read it into the record is because I think it's important that members of the government, who I believe want what all of us want, and that is appropriate oversight and accountability—I am concerned, however, that perhaps many members, because of how busy they are in their respective files, don't always get all of the information, and I know the public doesn't. So for that reason, I want to take the time now to read this letter into the record, as follows:

"I am writing further to the first reading of Bill 11, Ambulance Amendment Act (Air Ambulances).

"There is no doubt that any steps to increase the accountability of the air ambulance service is welcomed. Indeed, in the wake of the many stories of maladministration horrors that have plagued Ornge, sound public policy to bring proper oversight to this organization is still sorely needed.

"While moving in the right direction, measures such as the establishment of an Ornge patient advocate and Bill 11's creation of a new bureaucracy of 'special investigators' are insufficient to provide much-needed scrutiny, and continue to shield Ornge from Ombudsman oversight. My office remains unable to address any individual or systemic issues involving Ornge.

0910

"The Office of the Ombudsman of Ontario is a unique resource to support the Legislative Assembly in holding government accountable. It is there to allow the provincial Parliament to scrutinize government bodies. I cannot think of a more persuasive case for this than Ornge.

"Special Investigators,' under Bill 11, would enjoy authority similar to that of my office when it investigates the more than 500 ministries, agencies, boards, commissions, tribunals and corporations that fall under our jurisdiction. But there is an important difference: The 'special investigators' would report to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. They would not be independent of government. Far from being watchdogs, they would operate on a ministerial dog leash." Speaker, those are the words of our Ombudsman.

I continue:

"The newly created office of patient advocate has been positioned by the government as an additional oversight body that alleviates the need to extend Ombudsman oversight to Ornge. The Ombudsman is a fully independent officer of Parliament, established by statute with a mandate to investigate individual and systemic issues. By contrast, the patient advocate reports to an Ornge vice-president, not even to the board of directors. He or she resides within the bowels of the organization and cannot be expected to investigate any issue with institutional credibility. When this position was publicly advertised, the first line of the 'duties and responsibilities' in the job description noted that the incumbent would be required to '(I)investigate, resolve, document and report organization-specific patient and visitor compliments'"—Speaker, compliments—"and complaints." Needless to say, a

position that involves reporting compliments back to management ought not be confused with the role of the Ombudsman.

"The recent and proposed changes to Ornge are often put forward as responses to the Auditor General's March 2012 special report, Ornge Air Ambulance and Related Services. Yet nowhere in his report did he recommend (a) a new bureaucracy of 'Special Investigators;' (b) the creation of a patient advocate residing deep within Ornge whose partial responsibilities include being a clearing house for 'compliments;' or (c) the maintenance of the status quo with respect to the exclusion of any role for the Ombudsman.

"Every year, our office responds to tens of thousands of complaints, consistently demonstrating its value to elected representatives and the public. As 'Ontario's watchdog,' we are the gold standard in keeping government maladministration at bay. It simply does not make sense to perpetuate our exclusion in a bill that purports to bring credible accountability to Ornge. I would respectfully request your support in bringing the necessary amendments to Bill 11 to ensure that it meets the purpose for which it was presented to the Legislative Assembly.

"Yours truly,

"André Marin

"Ombudsman"

Speaker, this letter says it all. I want to advise the minister that we're quite confident that the minister won't be bringing forward this amendment, but we will. As the official opposition, this will, in fact, be the first amendment that we will be proposing to this bill, because we have no confidence that this government has any intention of opening up Ornge to scrutiny, to transparency and to accountability. Our concern is that the track record of this government on other files gives us and, I believe, the public very little confidence that they have any intention of being transparent in their dealings. We will wait to see how this government responds to our amendments.

Once again, we have a commitment from a Premier that it's a new day in this place, a new day of co-operation. We'll see how substantive that is when we bring forward amendments to this bill and others. We'll see if in fact there is substance to the words that we hear from this Premier.

I want to talk about the issue of the credibility of this bill. We're told that we needed this bill because there was no ability on the part of this government to exercise its oversight. After numerous witnesses from the government, all we have to do is read Hansard and the record of testimony from bureaucrats within the ministry, who confirmed for us that the original performance agreement under which Ornge was operating had numerous points of authority and that the ministry could and, in fact, was mandated to perform oversight, but they failed to do so.

One of the most shocking testimonies that we had came from Mr. Malcolm Bates. When I asked this gentleman, who is the director of the emergency health services branch of the ministry—the emergency health services branch of the ministry is the branch that had specific

responsibility to oversee our air ambulance service. I'm going to read from Hansard an exchange between myself and Mr. Bates. Again, I think it puts into context why we have serious concern about the seriousness of this government to deal with the issue of accountability.

From Hansard, my question to Mr. Bates: "You've made reference to the performance agreement. I have read the original performance agreement...."

"Nowhere in that performance agreement that I can see, unless you can point me to it, does it in any way relieve the Ministry of Health, and specifically the emergency health services branch responsible for air ambulance or ambulance services in the province, of its oversight responsibilities. In fact, there are very specific references to reporting that's required, to oversight responsibilities."

The response from Mr. Malcolm Bates: "I agree that the Ministry of Health and the emergency health services branch have and had oversight responsibilities and that oversight responsibility was basically set in line by the Ambulance Act, by the performance agreement and by the transfer-of-payment accountability directive."

Speaker, this is not a third party who has a vested interest in condemning the Ministry of Health. This is the director of the emergency health services branch, who testified before our committee that they, in fact, had responsibility. The record is very clear that that responsibility was not exercised.

In fact, it gets worse. The fact of the matter is that the same Malcolm Bates testified that he was actually directed by an associate deputy minister not to exercise those responsibilities. He testified at our committee that he was directed to do whatever he was instructed to do by one Dr. Chris Mazza.

0920

Now what does that tell you about the state of our Ministry of Health? What does that tell you about the position that civil servants are put into when they're told expressly, "Stand down." They knew what their responsibilities were; they knew their responsibility was to hold Ornge accountable. They saw what was going on. We had testimony from employees of Ornge that there were regular meetings between Ornge and the Ministry of Health. We had testimony and thousands of pages of documentation that showed that Ornge was in fact reporting—not everything, but much—to the Ministry of Health, and yet nothing was done. Why?

Well, one reason is that those civil servants who wanted to do something about it were handcuffed by their superiors. I ask this question: Given the testimony that we have had, I was hoping that at some point I would see the minister stand up and say, "You know, we've heard enough. And by the way, here's what's happening, we're going to hold our deputy to account. Sa d Rafi, you didn't do your job, your job's over. We're paying you hundreds"—I say hundreds—"of thousands"—that's what the deputy minister of health is getting paid. He didn't do his job, and I believe that people in this province are cynical about what happens in government

because they see the same malpractice, they see the same failures of oversight and maladministration, and no one is held accountable.

Oh, the minister is very quick to throw Chris Mazza under the bus. The minister is very quick to agree that Chris Mazza should repay—and by the way, I agree with that. Chris Mazza made horrible mistakes—bad judgment. I think it's probably one of the grossest demonstrations of greed and betrayal of the public trust that this province has ever seen on the part of a professional. However, he's only one player. The reason that he was able to do what he did was because the Ministry of Health did not hold him accountable. At what point should they have taken steps? The minute they found out that there were some 17 corporations that became part of the business plan to do what? Deliver an air ambulance service that used to be run out of Sunnybrook emergency room. What's that all about? Who's responsible? Chris Mazza is paying a price, and rightfully so.

Speaker, there is one chair in this legislative chamber that at the end of the day has responsibility and should be held accountable for what took place at Ornge, and that's that chair there, occupied by the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care—and now, thanks to the promotion offered her by our new Premier, the Deputy Premier. But that's not happening.

The second person who should be held accountable is Mr. Sa d Rafi, the Deputy Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Why is he able to simply go along as a senior bureaucrat in this government and have no consequences for his lack of oversight? And why is there not an internal investigation by this government, based on the evidence that we've had under oath about the fact that there were directions to civil servants to stand down and not to do their job?

And why is it, Speaker, that this minister and this Premier refuse to give oversight to the Ombudsman of this Legislature? I think anyone watching, anyone observing, anyone seeing what has taken place so far will understand there's a reason they don't want the Ombudsman to have access. There's far too much, far too much that they don't want either the Legislature or the public to find out.

But our responsibility is to continue, on behalf of the public, on behalf of taxpayers, to do what we can to shine the light on what I believe is a very, very serious betrayal of the public trust, and we'll continue to do that.

Public hearings into Ornge continue tomorrow. Speaker, I have asked that the first two witnesses that are called to the hearings are, first, the new CEO of Ornge, Dr. McCallum, who was the former chief coroner of the province—the reason I wanted to call Dr. McCallum as a witness is because I find incredibly disturbing the circumstances under which Dr. McCallum accepted his new responsibilities. You see, Dr. McCallum, as the chief coroner of this province, was the individual to whom I referred a number of cases of patients who died under questionable circumstances that involved Ornge air ambulance. I asked the coroner to investigate the role that

Ornge air ambulance may have played in contributing to the deaths of those patients. That same coroner, who was investigating Ornge, at some point entered into discussions about taking on a job, the senior role at Ornge.

I don't know about you, Speaker, but there are two questions that I have about that. First of all is the integrity and the judgment on the part of whoever—whether it was the Minister of Health; whether it was the Deputy Minister of Health; whether it was someone on the board of directors of Ornge, the new board—who took the initiative and approached the chief coroner, who was investigating them, about discussing a job, to come and work for them.

The second question I have is the judgment on the part of the chief coroner at the time for even entering into those discussions, knowing the professional responsibility that he had to the investigations that were going on.

You see, every time we turn around, every time a new file is opened on this Ornge air ambulance file, we have more reasons to question the credibility. We have fewer reasons to trust the Minister of Health and the board of directors, now the renewed board of directors. Something is terribly wrong here. We have to get to the bottom of it.

The next witness I have asked to be called is the commissioner of the Ontario Provincial Police. The reason is that we know that the Ontario Provincial Police were called in to investigate, and we've heard nothing over the last number of months in terms of what's happening in that investigation. Now, I know that the commissioner can't answer specific questions, and we have no intention of in any way interfering with or compromising that investigation. But I do think this House and the public deserve to at least know the resources that are being applied to that investigation, given the multi-millions of dollars that have been wasted of taxpayer dollars. I think we have the right to know that this investigation is being taken very seriously by our Ontario Provincial Police.

0930

I also think we have a right to know whether the OPP has called in the RCMP to assist in this investigation and whether the FBI has been called in from the United States. The reason for that is that we also, based on sworn testimony, know that there were some very questionable financial transactions that were of an international nature. If, in fact, the FBI has not been called in, then I believe there is something wrong and there is something questionable about how this entire investigation is being handled. I personally referred a number of transcripts to the US Attorney General for this very reason.

Some \$6.7 million has exchanged hands, with no value, and we know that based on sworn testimony. Those funds were transferred from AgustaWestland. We also know that the parent company of AgustaWestland, Finmeccanica—that two senior people in that company are now facing criminal charges for fraud and bribery. What is of interest is the same deal that Agusta entered into is reflected in that deal with India. How many helicopters did AgustaWestland sell to Ornge? Twelve. How many helicopters were involved in the deal with India?

Twelve. If you look at the financial transactions, there are uncanny parallels.

Speaker, if criminal charges are not laid in this case, the public will be wondering who's falling down on the job and who is protecting their interests. This is a serious issue that can't be covered up with Bill 11.

I want to talk about the issue that I think is top of mind for many employees, many front-line staff of Ornge, and I want to take this opportunity to thank the first responders at Ornge, and I include the paramedics; I include the pilots; I include the dispatchers; and I include those in administration, the employees who, day to day, attempt to do the very best that they can to provide a professional service. Unfortunately, over the years, they have been hampered and undermined in their ability to do that because of the mismanagement and the greed of a few people at the top of that organization. But I want to thank those front-line staff for their dedication.

I want to thank those who had the courage over the last number of months to come forward and to share with us—some dared to do so in public testimony. One of those individuals, as we know from the record, was summarily dismissed within days of appearing before the committee.

The threats to employees that come forward are keeping many of those employees silent—they need their job—and so we've been calling for whistle-blower protection. Interestingly enough, we have some surface reference to whistle-blower protection here. I want to point something out to the minister, as I did in the last debate on this. She ignored it; she'll probably ignore it again. However, we're going to, once again, provide an amendment. We'll file an amendment to this bill that gives serious whistle-blower protection.

Section 7.7 of this proposed bill talks about whistle-blower protection, but you know what? It limits the whistle-blower protection to very few people. Who can you expose information to? Well, your superiors at Ornge. Oh, really? Well, it's the superiors at Ornge who were the problem.

How can that be taken seriously by anyone? Why would an employee not be protected if they were to bring their concerns to a member of the Legislature? What's wrong with that? Why is it, as the Ombudsman points out, that this all has to be contained within the corporate structure and, in his words, in "the bowels of the organization"? What is that all about?

We will be presenting amendments to give employees the confidence that, if there's something that is not right that they see first-hand that's keeping them from doing their job, that's threatening patient safety, they have the boldness and the confidence that they can come forward without repercussions and get it dealt with. That's simply reasonable.

I want to refer as well, Speaker, to the issue of liability of the board of directors. As I said earlier, Chris Mazza is in the crosshairs of this government. I think the reason, of course, is that that is a very convenient sacrificial lamb. "Let's focus on Chris Mazza. Let's be adamant"—and

the minister makes no bones about how outraged she is at Chris Mazza's actions and his greed.

I want to ask this: Where was the board of directors while all of this was going on? I went through expense reports yesterday. Every one of the expense reports that I saw had the name of the chair of the board on it. Mr. Beltzner signed off on all of them. I went over the loans—\$450,000, \$250,000—signed off by Mr. Beltzner, chair of the board. There's such a thing as fiduciary responsibility on the part of someone who takes on the responsibility as a director of a corporation, whether that be a not-for-profit or whether that be a for-profit corporation. I want to assure the people of this province that we will be pursuing those directors who also had a responsibility to step in and ensure that the taxpayers were protected.

Speaker, in closing, I just simply want to make this point. I believe that the divesting of delivery of health care services can in fact be done, and it can be done efficiently and responsibly through a non-governmental organization, but what has to be in place is proper oversight, accountability, transparency. Who is responsible at the end of the day to ensure that, whatever arrangement is agreed to, whatever the document is under which those services are performed, that service provider is held accountable? It is the government of the day, and the government of the day cannot paper over its lack of responsibility and its failure. That's what they're trying to do with this bill.

0940

There is nothing of substance in this bill that will prevent what took place at Ornge. What will prevent what took place at Ornge is responsible oversight. That was the charge of the Minister of Health, the Deputy Minister of Health and the bureaucrats within government, who now have a responsibility to take this seriously. We look forward, perhaps at some point, to the Minister of Health standing in her place and doing that. Perhaps at some point there will be evidence that the deputy minister, Mr. Saïd Rafi, admits that he failed in his job, and that there will be consequences for those who didn't.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Comments and questions?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It was interesting to listen to the member from Newmarket–Aurora going through the trials and tribulations that surrounded our air ambulance, our air ambulance that used to be the pride and joy of this province for the good work that they did.

Then, how bad it all went, to the point where, in March 2012, the Auditor General tabled a special report. The Ambulance Amendment Act was tabled the same day. That was the government's response to what had been in the Auditor General's report, but it was really the government's response to what had been on the front page of the paper since December 2011.

But make no mistake, the problems at Ornge were known months and years before this. You will all remember, if you follow this, that I was subbed in in 2008 in estimates by Howard Hampton, who was the leader of

the NDP at the time—2008, that's five years ago—because whistle-blowers had started to come to the NDP. They had started to go to the Liberals and to the PCs as well. They were trying to tell their story to whoever would listen. So I was subbed in in estimates, and my leader asked 60 questions specifically about Ornge in estimates. Madam Speaker, we never got one single answer. The bureaucrats never knew we had questions, and no answer was forthcoming. That was in 2008, and the story goes downhill from there.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Certainly, I'd like to make a few comments in regard to the remarks of the member from Newmarket–Aurora. First of all, I want to say on behalf of the government that we are clear—our Premier has been clear, and our Minister of Health and Long-Term Care has been clear—that we want to get to the bottom of the problems at Ornge.

We also, in terms of some of his remarks, are anxious to talk to Dr. McCallum. Our side at public accounts will certainly be in favour of calling him as a witness, as the member from Newmarket–Aurora has suggested.

I want to say that some sort of accusations of complicity that were made are baseless, are false and are totally denied by our government.

Turning to the provisions within Bill 11, the Ambulance Amendment Act, we feel that they are a very good response to the Auditor General's report of March 2012 in terms of the new performance agreement. I've examined the Auditor General's reports and his recommendations, and what we are now requiring from Ornge, and I think there is a very good fit.

In terms of the whistle-blower provisions, these are the same provisions currently in place in the long-term-care act of 2007. As we know, in our long-term-care homes we have a very vulnerable population, just as we have with the patients at Ornge. I think that there's a good parallel in adopting those particular provisions.

Another important aspect of Bill 11 is that through regulation we will be making records available through FOI requests. This is something that clearly is needed and we're happy to include it in the bill. Certainly as we go forward, I expect everyone—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to comment on my colleague from Newmarket–Aurora and his address this morning.

You know, you'd think that the government would finally try to get it right. They keep talking about, "We want to get to the bottom of this; we want to correct this." Yet, when the bill was before the last session of Parliament, under Bill 55, they refused to call it for debate for such a long period of time, until Dalton McGuinty rode off into the sunset and the bill died.

My colleague offered numerous suggestions as to how this bill could be strengthened and improved, not only here in the House but at the committee level as well,

where over 15 days of committee hearings and 57 witnesses, they found out much more about the terrible scandal at Ornge that this government had perpetrated, along with their cohort Chris Mazza.

I would suggest that if you really want to get to the bottom of this, take heed to what the member from Newmarket–Aurora is saying. He has been on top of this file from the get-go. He is the one that brought this issue to this Parliament. I have to ask myself, as many people across Ontario are asking, what would have happened if the member from Newmarket–Aurora, Mr. Klees, had not brought this issue before this Parliament? Would it have been another one of those eHealth messes that we didn't find out about for a few more years? At least pay heed to what he is telling you now. He's giving you the opportunity to make sure that we have the best piece of legislation possible to ensure that this doesn't happen again. Mind you, let me be very clear: The search for the truth on the Ornge scandal will continue. I know this government will continue to try to stand in the way, and they will try to protect their own turf, but with the member from Newmarket–Aurora leading the charge, we will get to the bottom of this.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to actually weigh in on this very important issue. I think this morning the member from Nickel Belt has given us some important context for this conversation. This is a long-standing issue, where the public has been left out of the accountability formula for sure.

The member from Newmarket–Aurora raises some good issues around the whistle-blower protection. I want to be clear: Whistle-blowers are the front-line people in the field. They have the lived experience of the crisis that is Ornge. The pressure that is on these folks, who are delivering health care—the stress and the pressure on them to deliver goods to the public is profound. When they come to us, as legislators, and when they go to the public and say, "There are real issues. There is a crisis amongst our workers. The air ambulance attendants couldn't perform CPR in the designed air ambulances"—the public has no patience for it. They have no tolerance for it, and we need to do better. To not listen to the Ombudsman when he says that he needs oversight and to not take into account the weight of the responsibility that we have to ensure that true oversight is happening with Ornge is really a lack of potential for us as legislators.

We're going to stay on this file as well. The member from Nickel Belt has given us important context and history. There's still cause for concern, and so we're going to stay on this file as well. That's our job as the third party. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Newmarket–Aurora has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Frank Klees: Thank you, Speaker. I appreciate my colleagues' comments.

I want to point something out: Bill 50, which was the identical bill that we're now debating, was tabled for first

reading on March 21, 2012. It sat in this House for seven months. The House leader did not call this bill. The record will show that he stood up time and time again to say, "Why will members of the opposition not pass this bill?" The reason we didn't pass the bill was, first of all, it's a faulty bill, but even so, with the government not calling it, it was never debated. Now we have the same document before us, and we have the same rhetoric coming from the government.

0950

Speaker, I first raised a question in the House here in April 2011 about Ornge and what was going on. I asked the Minister of Health to investigate. I asked the Minister of Finance to investigate. I asked the Premier to investigate. This is all a matter of record in Hansard. Every one of them defended Ornge and assured us all was well. The Minister of Finance said, "Everything is in order." And here we are today and nothing has changed, except that we found out the truth, or at least some of it.

Now this same government continues to deflect responsibility. And until this government admits that they failed miserably, we'll continue our responsibility, as members of the official opposition, joined by members of the third party, to hold this government accountable. Thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It feels a little bit like *déjà vu* all over again. This bill has been tabled in this House before. As I mentioned, the Auditor General presented his report, a special report on investigations of value-for-money audits at Ornge, in March 2012. The same day, the Minister of Health responded with the Ambulance Amendment Act, the bill we are debating yet again this morning.

When she first presented the bill, we all understood that it was a bill that had been pulled together in haste. Ornge had made the headlines of the papers and the headlines of all of the media non-stop since December 2011. It had been a frenzy of information, all of them more damning, one more than the other, showing clearly that the government had not succeeded in its basic function of oversight of that organization. So the Ambulance Amendment Act was pulled together in haste and presented in front of the House.

Right away, we started to show flaws in the bill, but that's okay because that's the way the process works. You present it in first and second reading, then it goes to committee, and you get to basically make the bill stronger before it goes to third reading. But none of that happened, Madam Speaker. None of that happened. We were presented with a flawed bill back then, and we are presented again with the same flawed bill now.

I was more than willing to be patient and say, "Well, let the process unfold and we'll make the bill stronger" in 2012. We're now in March 2013, Madam Speaker. We were prorogued for over four months. What a good opportunity: If you really want to do something good, go back on those bills, make them stronger and fix the holes that we've already identified for you so that we can have

meaningful discussion moving forward. But none of that was done. The same flawed bill that was presented in haste to us in response to a media crisis is presented to us a year later.

The suggestions that were made by the official opposition and by the NDP are not reflected in the bill. I will give credit to the minister that—I was really insistent that Ornge be FOIable. That is, freedom of access of information should apply to Ornge, and we can see that this hopefully will get done through regulation. It has not happened yet, but we're hoping that it will happen. I will give her the benefit of the doubt on that one, because I always do.

Interjection.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Sometimes people question my judgment on that, but I like to stay positive.

So why was the bill flawed? Before I go into each and every one of the flaws in that bill, I'd like to give you the helicopter view of what it means. Basically, the ministry will tell you that they did not have the tools to deal with the crisis at Ornge, so what they are doing with the bill is giving themselves the tools. If you were to look at this and use a different language, the ministry used to have a little stick, and now they're giving themselves a really big stick to beat them if they ever need to.

The problem, Madam Speaker, was never the size of the stick that you can beat Ornge with; the problem was that they refused to act. It didn't matter how many whistle-blowers went to them. It didn't matter how many reports were submitted to them. It didn't matter where the money was going. They refused to act. They had measures and tools that they could have used. We had bureaucrats that came to us and said that they were willing to and had put forward steps to bring back Ornge, and they were told not to. So it's not because the stick was too small that they couldn't beat Ornge into submission; it was because they refused to use it.

Why? The jury is out on this. I certainly have my own personal opinion. They wanted this model. We've had air ambulance in Ontario since 1977. It is not a new service. I live in northern Ontario. I service a mainly rural area; I have 33 beautiful little communities in Nickel Belt. Most of them don't have ambulance services except for Ornge, except for air ambulance.

The service has been in place for many, many decades, but the Liberal government had this idea that they were going to privatize air ambulance. They were going to allow air ambulance to make money, to run like a business because, for some reason, running like a business is better than being accountable to the public. I don't know where those ideas come from, but it failed. It failed miserably. It failed in that it has shaken the confidence of every single Ontarian to the core.

When Ornge goes around with their little vans in my riding, you know what happens, Madam Speaker? People write messages on the sides of their helicopters—not the helicopters, sorry; on the side of the land ambulance that they use. I won't repeat the messages that are written on the sides, but they're not nice. The front-line workers are paying the price right now for errors that they did not do.

Those men and women continued through tough times to deliver as good a service as they could, when half of the fleet was not staffed, when the morale was below basement level and when they could see the corruption at the top. They tried so hard to tell everybody, "Look at what's happening at the top. This is wrong," and nobody would listen.

So now we have a service that nobody trusts anymore. In Nickel Belt, if you or your loved ones ever need an ambulance, there's a good chance that Ornge is going to be the one coming to rescue you. It used to be that we were proud of our air ambulance. Right now we're not. The confidence needs to be rebuilt.

Do you really think that by giving the Minister of Health a bigger stick, people in Nickel Belt and everywhere in Ontario where we depend on our air ambulance in times of need—do you really think this builds confidence? Absolutely not. They don't care about the size of the stick that the minister has because she had one before and she didn't use it. What they want is, they want to be included in this equation. They want to make sure that if they see something wrong, there will be a response; that if a whistle-blower comes forward, she or he won't lose their job, and it will be acted upon. They want to be included in this.

1000

How do you include people? The first way is, you listen to them. You listen to them. Who better to listen than our Ombudsman? Who do people naturally turn to when something goes wrong with the services of the provincial government? They phone the Ombudsman. This is what they're there for. This is what they're known for. So the Ombudsman gets the call, he gets the complaint, he hears the story, and his answer back is, "I'm sorry, I don't have jurisdiction." Do you really think that helps build the confidence back? Not at all.

How else can people get involved? Through freedom-of-access-to-information requests. If all of those whistle-blowers, everybody on the front lines and their families, who knew that things were wrong at the top had been able to file freedom-of-access—I can tell you that my party, the NDP, filed many freedom-of-access-to-information requests for Ornge, way back, from 2009, 2010, 2011. What kind of response did we get? I won't keep you in suspense or anything. Nada. We did not get any answers to our freedom-of-access-to-information requests. Although we knew something was going wrong, as we tried to find more proof—when you have seven whistle-blowers telling you the exact same story and they come from seven different parts of the province, you start to believe that there's probably some truth to that story. So when you start to dig in to see what's really happening, the Ombudsman can't help you because he doesn't have jurisdiction. The freedom-of-access-to-information request is useless, because we get no response.

Hey, estimates came up. "We'll ask our question through estimates. They have to give us answers when we file questions through estimates." That was met with nothing.

I haven't been a politician for that long; I've been a politician for five years. Whenever I participated in estimates, I always got answers. You don't always get them right there on the spot. The minister is there and all of the top bureaucrats are there, and they try their best to give you answers but sometimes they just don't know, but they go and they get you answers and they submit them to the Clerk, and they become part of the record and you have them in writing. You get answers because estimates is a serious process of this Legislative Assembly that allows us to look into how taxpayers' money is being spent.

How could it be that if you look around at all of the questions we've ever asked of the Minister of Health, not one estimates Ornge question was ever answered? Not one. Months went by. Years went by. It didn't matter what the Clerk did to try to get answers. It didn't matter what we did to try to get answers. Nothing came.

The Ombudsman is not allowed to look in. The freedom-of-access-to-information requests to try to see what's going on bring back nothing. We asked questions in estimates, and that brings back nothing.

There's also a committee process where an agency can be called in front of the Legislature to basically bring accountability, to answer questions. Ornge cannot be called in front of committee. Why? I don't know. What harm would there be in having Ornge added to the thousands of agencies, boards and commissions that can be called in front of the Legislative Assembly? I don't know. I asked for that. We all did because, remember, we want to bring that balance. We want to bring that balance that says, "We've been burned once, where the minister didn't act. Now we want to be part of the equation." "We" as in the capital. "We the people of Ontario want to be part of this equation." They also want to have a say. They want to be able to hold the government accountable and hold the different agencies, boards and commissions of this province accountable.

This is a process that doesn't cost anything. This is a precedent that exists for thousands of agencies of the Ministry of Health. This is something that, 12 months ago, we were asking for, and this is something that is not in the bill.

The bill will give the minister a great big stick, but it's the other side of the accountability ledger that hasn't moved. It is the side that is, to me, the most important. It is the side that will help the people of Ontario who depend on our air ambulance in their times of need. This is the side that would help us build confidence in that agency again, because right now, in the trust account, they are in overdraft. Nobody trusts them anymore.

You cannot put every flaw of Ornge on the front page of every Ontario paper for weeks and months—a year now—on end, because the story hasn't ended, and expect people to trust them. It's really too bad. No disrespect to all the good men and women who work day in and day out to make it work. It's through a change that this confidence account will rebuild trust, and trust is at the core of everything that the health care system does.

If you don't have confidence in your health care provider—it doesn't matter how good the care is—it's not going to work. It's not going to work because we are human beings, and health care is really a relationship between two people: the person who helps and the person in need. Once the trust is gone, it's really hard to have quality care.

This is the situation we find ourselves in right now. We find ourselves in a situation where the trust account for our air ambulance system has been completely depleted, and we have a minister whose idea of fixing it is to give herself a bigger stick. I have no problem with giving the minister some new powers to deal with Ornge.

I will go through the bill in more detail. Unfortunately, my one-hour lead will be cut in two. This is one of the shows where you'll want to tune in a little bit later because in a few seconds I'm going to be—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Do we get scenes from our next episode?

Mme France Gélinas: Yes. You can get tickets for prime seats for the next episode coming soon. I'm about to be off-air. But that doesn't take away the seriousness of what we're talking about.

I will go through the bill more or less clause by clause to show—some of the new powers of the minister, I have no problem with. They are powers that exist with many other transfer payment agencies of the Ministry of Health, and they have served the people of Ontario well when the minister chooses to use them. But there are other new powers in there that I don't think are for the benefit of the people of Ontario.

When my time comes again, I will go through step by step as to what is good in that bill, because there are some good things. I will show you what is not so good in that bill; that is basically a bill that was put together in haste, with cut and paste from other areas of the health care system that make very little sense for Ornge. Some of that bill is clearly ugly, not to mention the huge omissions in that bill. The huge omissions have to do with rebuilding the public trust in an agency that many of us depend on and giving us, as in the people of Ontario, an opportunity to be involved so that, if we see something wrong coming again, we know that we will be listened to, we know that we will be heard, and we know that something will happen, because last time it didn't.

1010

Ca me fait toujours plaisir de commencer les discussions sur un nouveau projet de loi. Le projet de loi pour les ambulances aériennes, ce n'est pas un projet de loi nouveau; c'est un projet de loi qui nous avait été présenté en mars 2012, il y a à peu près un an de ça. Il avait été présenté la même journée que le vérificateur général nous avait présenté son rapport, un rapport qui démontrait que les activités à Ornge n'étaient pas en ligne avec ce qui aurait dû être fait. Non seulement qu'elles n'étaient pas en ligne avec ce qui aurait dû être fait, mais on se doutait qu'il y avait également des éléments illégaux qui se passaient à Ornge.

Donc, le vérificateur général soumet son rapport, un rapport qui, vraiment, remet les pendules à l'heure. On ne

peut plus ignorer le fait que les choses vont mal à Ornge. La ministre de la Santé dépose le projet de loi, un projet de loi qui avait été mis ensemble un peu trop rapidement et qui avait des grosses lacunes. Donc, la première fois que le projet de loi a été présenté, on a démontré là où étaient les lacunes.

Vous allez tous vous souvenir que l'Assemblée législative a été prorogée. « Proroger » est un grand mot qui veut dire qu'on arrête tout ce qui se passe et qu'on efface tout ce qui se passe. Ça, c'est le « Magic Eraser » de M. Clean; on efface tout ce qui se passe. Donc, on a effacé tout le travail qui avait été fait.

Pour moi, ça aurait été le moment idéal pour retravailler le projet de loi. On savait qu'il y avait des lacunes. On savait que c'était un projet de loi qui avait été mis ensemble à la hâte. Profitons-en pour montrer quelque chose de meilleur.

Bien, on est maintenant en mars 2013. Ça fait un an de ça et la ministre de la Santé nous présente exactement le même projet de loi. Elle le sait très bien qu'il y a des lacunes dans son projet de loi parce que les membres du parti néo-démocrate et les membres de l'opposition officielle ont dit : « Écoute, il y a des bonnes choses dans ton projet de loi, mais il y en a également qui ont besoin d'être retravaillées. » Elle nous représente la même chose—identique; il n'y a pas un mot qui a été changé.

Bien, qu'est-ce que vous pensez, madame la Présidente? C'est sûr que les mêmes lacunes sont également là. Non seulement y avait-il des lacunes dans son projet de loi, mais il y a des parties de ce projet de loi qui ne sont pas acceptables parce que le projet de loi est vraiment fait pour donner plus d'outils, plus de mesures, à la ministre de la Santé pour faire son travail de surveiller Ornge. Certaines de ces mesures-là sont bonnes; ce sont des mesures qui existent ailleurs dans le système de la santé et qui servent bien les Ontariens et Ontariennes. Certaines autres de ces mesures, franchement, sont plutôt drastiques et n'ont pas vraiment leur place, mais elles ont quand même été gardées dans ce projet de loi-là pour des raisons qui m'échappent.

Donc, on se retrouve, un an plus tard, avec un projet de loi qui n'a pas été retravaillé. Moi je me dis : « Tu sais, les quatre mois de prorogation n'ont pas été bien utilisés. » Au moins, ça nous aurait donné une opportunité en or de présenter des projets de loi plus solides. Non, cette opportunité-là, on l'a laissée aller complètement. On nous représente exactement la même chose avec les mêmes lacunes, les mêmes défauts et le même manque de travail. Ça avait été fait vite; ça paraît. On va en vivre avec les conséquences.

De notre côté, ce qu'on aimerait vraiment voir dans le projet de loi, c'est un meilleur équilibre entre les nouvelles mesures et outils que la ministre de la Santé veut pour faire son travail de supervision d'Ornge. Mais, en même temps, on veut donner au public ontarien la chance d'être, lui aussi, entendu. La meilleure façon d'être entendu, tout le monde le sait, c'est d'appeler l'ombudsman. Aussitôt qu'il y a quelque chose qui se passe dans les programmes et services du gouvernement

provincial, la première chose que les gens ont tendance à faire, c'est d'appeler l'ombudsman.

Je vois que vous êtes prête à vous lever, madame. I'll let you.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): It being 10:15, this House stands recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We have with us today in the Speaker's gallery, from the Brazilian state of Amapá, the governor, Mr. Camilo Capiberibe, and his council. We welcome him today.

The Minister of Finance on the introduction of guests.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Welcome.

Remarks in Portuguese.

My cousin, I should say, José Carlos Sousa is here as well. Thank you very much, all of you, for being here.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I appreciate the Minister of Finance showing up the Speaker in another language.

Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Brad Duguid: As members probably know, students have come here from across the province to meet with us, their members of all parties, to discuss post-secondary issues and education. OUSA represents 155,000 students in Ontario. I'd like to welcome student leaders from Brock University, Wilfrid Laurier University, McMaster University, Queen's University, Trent University at Oshawa, the University of Waterloo, Western University and the University of Windsor. Who knows; I may have left some out. Welcome to all the students, and I'm sure we're all looking forward to meeting with you today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): As I did yesterday, I will remind the members that when you're doing introductions—and I didn't hear any names—it's not a moment for statements; it's a moment to introduce our guests. I reminded someone else who was watching carefully that I gave you the same message.

Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Employment.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: St. Paul's page Joshua Limpert is joined here today in the gallery by his mother, Ann Stewart; Brad Limpert, his father; and his brother Noah.

Hon. Reza Moridi: It's my pleasure to introduce and welcome grade 10 students from Langstaff Secondary School in my riding of Richmond Hill. They're not in the gallery, but they are in the building, and we welcome them.

MEMBERS' PRIVILEGES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): On February 20, 2013, the member for Prince Edward-Hastings, Mr. Smith, rose on a point of privilege concerning the government's incomplete production of documents relating

to its decision to cancel the construction of two power plants in 2010 and 2011.

According to the member, in the previous session, government members had made deliberately misleading statements about the extent of production, and the Minister of Energy had failed to produce all documents responsive to the order of the House. The government House leader, Mr. Milloy, and the member from Timmins–James Bay, Mr. Bisson, also spoke to the matter.

Having reviewed the notice provided by the member from Prince Edward–Hastings, the written submissions of the government House leader and of the official opposition House leader, relevant Hansards from the current and previous sessions, and various parliamentary authorities, I am now prepared to rule on the matter.

Let me begin by providing some background. The member's point of privilege arises out of the government's initial non-production of all documents that were the subject of a May 16, 2012, order of the Standing Committee on Estimates, a September 13, 2012, Speaker's ruling to the effect that a *prima facie* case of privilege had been established with respect to the non-production, and an October 2 order of the House directing "the Minister of Energy and the Ontario Power Authority to table immediately with the Clerk of the House all remaining documents ordered by the Standing Committee on Estimates on May 16, 2012."

As members are aware, many responsive documents were tabled on September 24 and October 12, and then more recently on February 21. The September 24 tabling, which was made in the aftermath of the September 13 Speaker's ruling, included a cover letter from the Minister of Energy to the effect that he had been "advised by ministry staff that the documents attached to this letter comprise all documents that are responsive to the committee's request regardless of privilege or confidentiality," as well as a cover letter from the chief executive officer of the Ontario Power Authority to the effect that "[t]hese documents comprise responsive material" related to the committee's May 16 requests.

In the first few days of the September 24 tabling, many government members indicated that the tabled documents constituted full production of the documents sought. However, these statements did not appear to be accurate because many more documents, including a cover letter from the Deputy Minister of Energy and another from the chief executive officer of the Ontario Power Authority, were tabled on October 12.

At the outset of the next sessional day, October 15, the Minister of Energy and the government House leader corrected their records concerning post-September 24 statements that they had made inside and outside the House to the effect that the September 24 tabling constituted full production.

On a point of privilege raised later the same day, the member from Prince Edward–Hastings alleged that statements many government members had made in the House after September 27 were misleading. According to the member, government members indicated to the House after September 27 that all documents responsive

to the May 16 request for documents by the Standing Committee on Estimates and the September 13 Speaker's ruling had been tabled on September 24 when, according to information contained in letters tabled on October 12, they purportedly knew by September 27 that this was not the case.

My ruling on this point of privilege was reserved, but the ruling was never made in the previous session because prorogation occurred the same day, hence the reason for the member rising on the point of privilege on February 20.

I first want to clarify that the September 13 ruling did not constitute an order to produce the documents in question. The Speaker has no authority to order production; only the House and its committees can do so. As already noted, the authority to order production was exercised in the previous session on May 16, in the case of the Standing Committee on Estimates, and on October 2, in the case of the House.

In written submissions on this point of privilege, the official opposition House leader points me to two rulings in the Canadian House of Commons by Speaker Milliken that he believes are instructive in the case at hand and supportive of the point of privilege raised by the member from Prince Edward–Hastings.

The most recent was made on March 9, 2011, and arose from a point of privilege raised as a result of a report by the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. In that report, the committee noted that the Minister of International Cooperation, Bev Oda, made inconsistent statements in the House and in the committee concerning the funding of a foreign aid organization called Kairos. The crux of this ruling surrounded the fact that sufficiently different statements were made in two parliamentary venues, such that they caused confusion that had not been cleared up. In the face of these contradictory statements, which remained unrecalled, Speaker Milliken found that sufficient doubt existed to warrant a finding of *prima facie* privilege in that case.

1040

I do not see this decision as being applicable to the point raised by the member from Prince Edward–Hastings because there has been no case made that confusingly contradictory statements have been made to this House.

The other Milliken ruling drawn to my attention was made on February 1, 2002, and concerned an allegation that then-National Defence Minister Art Eggleton had deliberately misled the House of Commons. This ruling has been referred to in this House before and was directly addressed by Speaker Carr in his June 17, 2002, ruling as follows:

"I see no precedential value to Speaker Milliken's ruling—within the ambit of parliamentary privilege—since, if the ruling is carefully read, it becomes apparent that a *prima facie* case of privilege was not explicitly found. Rather, Speaker Milliken seems to have stopped himself short in that regard and chose instead a novel approach, finding ultimately—without mentioning privil-

ege—that the matter deserved consideration by a committee, and inviting a motion to give effect to this result.

"I would generally be hesitant to appropriate for myself such an original, informal approach since the precedents, traditions and customs of this House around questions of privilege reveal a more definitive tendency. In my view, there are no shades of grey when it comes to parliamentary privilege, and I would not like to promote such a view by delivering a ruling that failed to address, squarely and solely on its procedural merits, the question raised."

I concur with the view of Speaker Carr, and later that of Speaker Peters, who similarly rejected the precedential usefulness of this Milliken ruling on September 28, 2009.

In the point raised by the member from Prince Edward-Hastings, the allegation is that misleading information was knowingly given to the House. As was indicated in various oral and written submissions on this matter, the criteria for determining whether a member has deliberately misled the House is described on pages 653 and 654 of the third edition of McGee's Parliamentary Practice in New Zealand in the following terms:

"There are three elements to be established when it is alleged that a member is in contempt by reason of a statement that the member has made: The statement must, in fact, have been misleading; it must be established that the member making the statement knew at the time the statement was made that it was incorrect; and, in making it, the member must have intended to mislead the House."

These criteria are, by their very nature, not easily satisfied. As Speaker Carr indicated at page 102 of the journals for June 17, 2002:

"The threshold for finding a *prima facie* case of contempt against a member of the Legislature, on the basis of deliberately misleading the House, is therefore set quite high and is very uncommon. It must involve a proved finding of an overt attempt to intentionally mislead the Legislature. In the absence of an admission from the member accused of the conduct, or of tangible confirmation of the conduct, independently proved, a Speaker must assume that no honourable members would engage in such behaviour or that, at most, inconsistent statements were the result of inadvertence or honest mistake."

I now turn to the application of the first criteria in the McGee test to what was said and done between September 24 and October 15. Were misleading statements made to the House? With respect to the September 24 tabling, the Minister of Energy indicated in his September 24 letter that he had been "advised by ministry staff" that the September 24 tabling constituted full production.

The Minister of Energy and the government House leader both subsequently used unequivocal language and described those documents as fully responsive to the orders for their production, as did various other government members. As we all know, that was not the case, so there can be no doubt that these statements were incorrect and thereby could have been misleading.

Did the members making the statements know at the time they were made that they were incorrect? The member for Prince Edward-Hastings says that, according to the information contained in the letters accompanying the October 12 tabling of documents, the government became aware of the existence of additional documents by September 27. However, a close reading of the letters suggests only that the government knew on that date that there was a possibility that there were additional responsive documents, and that, based on that possibility, a process was put in place to determine whether or not there actually were additional responsive documents.

After September 27, presumably equipped with the knowledge that the potential existed that there were further documents beyond those tabled on September 24, the unequivocal language ceased. In my mind, this represents a conscious effort to ensure that subsequent statements to the House were correct. There is no evidence before me that convinces me that the former Minister of Energy and other members of the government had any reason not to accept the information that they initially had that all of the documents had been tabled on September 24. Indeed, the letters tabled on September 24 confirm that this was the information they had been given. In my opinion, they had an honest belief that their resulting statements were true; both the Minister of Energy and the government House leader avowed this to the House on October 15. I have not been convinced that the second McGee criterion has been established.

While this sequence of events certainly demonstrates that some statements were incorrect when they were made, as I have said, I accept that they were believed to be true at the time, not made with the intention of misleading the House, and corrected at the earliest opportunity when it became clear they were incorrect. There is no evidence before me that would support a contrary opinion.

For these reasons, I find that a *prima facie* case of contempt on the basis that a member has deliberately misled the House has not been established.

In closing, I thank the member for Prince Edward-Hastings, the government House leader and the member for Timmins-James Bay for speaking to this matter, and the government House leader and the official opposition House leader for their written submissions.

The member for Prince Edward-Hastings on a point of order.

Mr. Todd Smith: I thank you very much for your ruling, sir.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ARBITRATION

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question is to the Premier—and let me say thank you, Speaker, for your considered ruling. I do want to say that, while two ministers—Minister Bentley and Minister Milloy—apologized to the

assembly, there remain 28 other Liberals who have not yet apologized to the assembly for giving information that was not in keeping with the facts, including the Premier herself. I hope that the Liberals will take the time today to apologize to all members with respect to gas plant documents that were buried.

To the Premier: When Ontario's economy is barely growing, Ontario's broken arbitration system is handing out agreements that are simply out of line with taxpayers' ability to pay and are causing municipalities to cut back on crucial front-line services. By way of example, an arbitrator recently gave Peterborough firefighters a 10.4% wage increase, while another one gave TTC workers a 6% increase that will cost \$100 million. Premier, what are you prepared to do to fix the broken arbitration system—including supporting our PC bill?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I also thank you for your ruling.

In the spring—in the budget—we actually proposed interest-based arbitration reforms. We put those in the budget last spring, and what those reforms would have done is that they would have increased accountability, transparency and the timeliness of the decisions. In fact, those are the kinds of changes that I know that municipalities were looking for.

I was the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing at the time. I was meeting monthly with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario; this was something that they were very concerned about. That's why we put them in the budget. It would have been fantastic if the opposition had supported those measures.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Obviously, Speaker, it's a disappointing response by the Premier. There's that old expression: "The more things change, the more they stay the same." That's exactly what Dalton McGuinty used to say, sitting in the exact same spot. I thought this Premier was going to take a different path, but she seems determined to entrench the McGuinty agenda.

1050

What you said, Premier, is actually not in keeping with the facts. I'll remind you that the Association of Municipalities of Ontario said, with respect to those reforms, that they "stopped short of achieving a balanced system—one that is truly transparent and accountable—for all parties, including arbitrators, and particularly for taxpayers." I think they've called you out on this—that your reforms were not truly reforms—so, hopefully you'll move beyond saying something that's not, in fact, true.

Let me ask you in a different way: Premier, do you think that wage settlements for public sector unions that are running 50% to 80% ahead of inflation are fair to the 80% of taxpayers who are not on the public sector payroll? How do you reconcile that kind of differential?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: In fact, the settlements that are coming in are running at 0.2% increases, and we've seen zero-zero in many, many of our sectors, so

we actually are seeing success in terms of the wage constraint that we said we were going to put in place.

I agree with the Leader of the Opposition that municipalities would have liked to see us go farther; I understand that. But the changes, the reforms that we put in the budget were clearly taking us in the direction that the municipalities wanted to see us go in, and they clearly were taking us in the direction that the party opposite wanted to see us go in, in terms of transparency, in terms of timeliness of decisions. That's why it was very, very surprising that the PCs joined with the NDP and pulled those measures out of the budget. It made no sense, since it was the direction that they were pushing us to go in.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Final supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: It's disappointing, Speaker, that every day this Premier seems to mouth the exact same words that Dalton McGuinty mouthed on these exact same issues. I thought she was trying to move beyond that, but she seems very much to have the same viewpoints as her predecessor.

The choice was clear. Municipalities opposed your bill; we did as well. You've chosen your path. You're on the side of public sector union bosses. We're on the side of taxpayers. We're on the side of municipalities. We're on the side of front-line services, on this side of the House.

I would like the Premier to know that Mr. Wilson, the member for Simcoe-Grey, will be introducing the Capacity to Pay Act, which is exactly what municipalities have asked for and exactly what Don Drummond, your hand-picked economist, had recommended. We stand behind Mr. Wilson's bill. Premier, will you do the right thing and stand up for taxpayers instead of union bosses and endorse Mr. Wilson's bill?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you, Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, I am very, very proud of our government's record on supporting municipalities, working with municipalities, uploading the costs that were downloaded onto their tax base. That was far and away the clear issue when municipalities came to us and said, "We need relief on this."

They also said, "We need help on interest-based arbitration." We put measures into the budget that were designed to create timeliness, to create transparency. They were absolutely the direction that we needed to go in. After speaking in favour of that direction, after speaking in support of those changes, the party opposite worked with the NDP to remove those from the budget and it made absolutely no sense. It meant that we were not able to move ahead with those changes to the interest-based arbitration system that would have made it more transparent. That's the direction that we needed to go in.

ARBITRATION

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier: I'm not going to let you off the hook on this. You have made your

choice to line up with the government union bosses. We're going to stand for taxpayers, for front-line services, and if you won't show leadership, we will with Mr. Wilson's bill that will fix a broken arbitration system in our province.

I'll refer the Premier to chapter 15, page 372 of the Drummond commission recommendations. Mr. Drummond, who we all respect, I think did a very good job in giving a direction on how we can get out of this fiscal mess. Mr. Drummond, Speaker, recommended 13 specific changes to fix the arbitration system. Mr. Wilson, the member for Simcoe-Grey's bill incorporates all 13 of Mr. Drummond's recommendations. I'll ask the Premier, who, I would assume, has faith in Mr. Drummond: How many of Mr. Drummond's 13 recommendations are you prepared to accept?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We took direction from Don Drummond. He said that interest-based arbitration was a system that needed to be fixed. What was bewildering, Mr. Speaker, was that the party opposite wouldn't work with us and did not see that the changes that we had put in the budget bill actually would have made some reform to the interest-based arbitration system that would have helped.

The member opposite talks about front-line services. In terms of support for the people of Ontario in making sure that services are delivered, we know that uploading the costs from the municipal tax base, supporting municipalities in their ability to deliver services to their communities and making sure that those costs that were downloaded by the previous government are now being uploaded—that was the single most important thing we could do to make sure that those front-line services at the municipal level were delivered to the people of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'll remind the Premier: Of the reforms that Dalton McGuinty brought forward that you have embraced, you implemented fully one out of 13 of Mr. Drummond's recommendations. Even to the extent that you've watered down standards in our education system, surely one out of 13 is nowhere close to a passing grade. We believe that we should implement all 13 of Mr. Drummond's recommendations. The Association of Municipalities of Ontario agree with us, and we'll bring forward a bill to do so.

We're very concerned with the agreements that arbitrators are giving out. That means a reduction in front-line services. It means higher taxes for families, and we think fundamentally that these decisions need to reflect private sector realities: the ability of taxpayers and municipalities to pay these bills. If Don Drummond is with us, municipalities are with us and taxpayers are with us, Premier, why aren't you?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I am very surprised by the line of questioning that we're getting from the official opposition, because I was the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance when Bill 55, the spring budget, was

being debated in the committee, and I was surprised, and so were the government members at that time, at how the opposition party, at that time, voted against those suggestions. They were coming straight from their platform in many instances, and they had no reasonable response as to why they were voting against those proposals that actually met what the Association of Municipalities of Ontario was asking for. They were really satisfying the needs of the opposition party.

We put proposals in place that brought timeliness to the interest arbitration process, that brought fairness and transparency. I ask the opposition party to support those changes so that we can provide a clear mechanism for our municipalities.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier, Speaker: It certainly is disappointing to see maybe a different face in the chair but to hear Dalton McGuinty's voice over and over again here in the Legislature. I think people are looking for change.

Mayor Hazel McCallion, respected mayor of Mississauga, said the following: "It is reasonable that annual pay raises reflect the economic circumstances of the community they serve, and to be comparable to increases given to its other municipal employees."

We, on this side of the House, agree with Mayor McCallion in that. We agree with AMO. We agree with Don Drummond. Quite frankly, somebody has to stand up for taxpayers who are footing this bill.

I worry with this competition between Premier Wynne and the NDP to win the fealty of the public sector union bosses at any expense. You can't get blood from a stone. Will you stand up for taxpayers, Premier? Will you endorse the outstanding bill standing in Mr. Wilson's name to fix the broken arbitration system and protect public services?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I think it's really important to look a little bit in detail as to the proposals that we brought forward that the opposition parties voted against. More specifically, Speaker, what we were requiring was for interest arbitrators, when requested by a party, to provide written reasons demonstrating that they have given proper consideration to the statutory criteria. We were also creating a deadline for the issuance of interest arbitration decisions. Lastly, we were establishing a clear consequence for matters that failed to meet this deadline. Cases not decided within that required timeframe would be automatically referred to the Ontario Labour Relations Board for resolution.

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Now, I've heard the Leader of the Opposition speak at AMO and other meetings, and that's exactly the kind of things he's been asking for, and we have actually provided for them in the amendments, but they voted against them.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Work together with us—
Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We've reverted to something I've been asking us to avoid, and that is when somebody is putting a question, I'm hearing noise coming from the very side that's putting the question, which prompts the other people to respond. And when somebody's giving the answer, I hear a response from the people who are giving the answer, to prompt them. If that stops, we can cut down on this and get more questions in, in realization that all we want to do is put the question and get an answer.

New question.

HOME CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I don't need the member from Renfrew commenting right when I finish.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I want to follow up with the Premier on some specific proposals on health care that I think we can achieve this year. I've been hearing that the government says that they like home care, and they plan to invest in it.

My question is a pretty simple one: Will the government actually commit to a five-day home care guarantee for Ontarians?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm just delighted that the third party continues to come back to this question of how we can support more people in their homes, because that is where we have a great opportunity to provide care that people need, in the right environment, and that is in their home. So we are absolutely committed to investing more in the community sector, more in the home care sector.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of the Environment, come to order.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: We have seen wait times come down—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): And the member from Leeds-Grenville, come to order.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: —and I welcome the opportunity to work with the third party to make sure that we do get the right investments in our home care sector. We've made great progress. There is more to do, and I'm delighted that we have a partner with the NDP on this.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Back to the Premier: Does the Premier believe that we need to fire nurses and close beds at hospitals in order to achieve a home care guarantee for the people of this province?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I think the member opposite, the leader of the third party, really does need to understand the transformation that is taking place in our health care system.

We simply must shift our health care spending. We're not in a world where we can see 6% to 7% annual increases in our health care budget. That is not our reality anymore. That's why we have to choose where we are going to spend our increases in health care spending, and we have decided, based on the advice of the entire health care sector, that where we have the greatest opportunity is in the home care sector.

Let me give some examples of the 4% community increase—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Northumberland. Bring it down.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: —that is facilitated by taking a stronger line on hospitals. In Erie-St. Clair: over \$4.7 million to the CCAC to increase home care and reduce ALC rates. I've got other examples I'll be more than happy to share.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Back to the Premier: When will the Premier move on cost-saving initiatives like a hard cap on CEO salaries in hospitals?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I think that our hospital sector is doing very difficult and very good work as they go through their budgets, understanding that historic increases are not in their future.

We are investing more in the community. In Niagara, at the United Mennonite Home, we're increasing the number of personal support workers to provide overnight coverage for seniors living in supportive housing. In Brant, we're supporting the Ontario March of Dimes for a community-based falls-prevention exercise program for at-risk seniors in their homes. In the Canadian Association of Mental Health, Haldimand-Norfolk branch, we're providing nearly \$800,000 for mental health and addictions support. That includes a mobile crisis support, intensive case management, and counselling.

Speaker, we are investing more in the community to keep people out of hospital.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is for the Premier. I'm concerned that the Premier and the Minister of Health are giving Ontarians a false choice. The government is suggesting that Ontarians can have front-line care in hospitals or they can have home care.

New Democrats have a balanced approach that provides a five-day home care guarantee, without firing nurses and closing hospital beds.

Why is the government saying that Ontarians have to choose between home care and hospital beds but refusing to move on basic cost-saving measures like capping the hospital CEO salaries?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care has given some very specific examples of investments that we are making in health care in various parts of the province. The reality is that we are increasing—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek, come to order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —funding to health care; we are increasing funding to hospitals—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member will come to order. Second time.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: But we also have to make sure that the right care is being delivered to people in the right venue. That does not mean that we won't continue to make investments.

This morning, I joined the Minister of Health—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Northumberland, come to order: second time, maybe third.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —and the Minister of Research and Innovation at Sick Kids Hospital; we made an announcement about the Ontario Brain Institute, that we're going to continue to invest \$100 million over the next five years in the Ontario Brain Institute, to look at issues like depression and Alzheimer's. Those kinds of investments are going to make the health care system sustainable. They will save us money in the future and make people's lives better.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, here's what reality the people of this province are seeing: a government that says they're improving home care, but some people are waiting as long as 262 days to get the support they need; nurses being fired and beds being closed in hospitals in Windsor and in London, while the government refuses to cap CEO salaries in the hospital sector.

Does the Premier understand that people are tired of hearing promises of change—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Transportation, come to order.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: —and getting the same old status quo over and over again?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We have said clearly that there is more to do in home care; the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care has said it over and over again. In fact, we are committing more dollars to home care and providing more services to people in their homes and in the community. That's what a large part of the health care transformation is about. It's not about making a choice between acute care and home care; it's about making sure we provide the right home care, the right acute care, the right supports for people in the community.

The leader of the third party shakes her head, Mr. Speaker, but the reality is that we have to find ways to

make sure that the health care system changes with the needs of the people of the province, with an aging demographic, with different expectations on the part of those people who want to be in their homes and don't want to be in an acute care bed. We've got more work to do, and I'm hoping we can work with the third party on this.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, I've heard the Premier talk many times about being interested in a balanced approach. For us, a balanced approach means helping seniors deal with illness at home without firing nurses and closing hospital beds; a balanced approach means capping six-figure executive salaries in hospitals so we can get 6,000 people off of home care waiting lists in this province.

Is the Premier ready to stop engaging in a conversation about a balanced approach and start taking action so Ontarians can have a five-day home care guarantee that we can afford?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I think what we have here is a failure to do the math. Our recommendation, our transformation of health care, does require that we hold the line on hospital expenditures so that we can invest more in home care. The NDP, I'm afraid, is wanting to have it both ways. They don't want to make the decisions that will facilitate enhanced investments in home care.

The reality is, procedures that used to keep people in hospital for a week or two weeks are now performed as day surgery. The requirements for our hospitals are changing as our technology changes and as our population changes. We need to harness the savings that we can so we can accommodate the increased needs of our seniors, as our population ages, in their own homes.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Premier. After 15 days of public hearings into the Ornge scandal and some 57 witnesses, it was confirmed in the course of those hearings that the Ministry of Health had very specific authority and responsibilities to oversee Ornge. In fact, the director of the emergency health services branch said under oath the following: "I agree that the Ministry of Health and the emergency health services branch have and had oversight responsibilities, and that oversight responsibility was basically set in line by the Ambulance Act, by the performance agreement and by the transfer-of-payment accountability directive."

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Given confirmation through those sworn testimonies that the ministry had specific authority, why is there no one in the Ministry of Health or any other department of the government that has been held accountable for their lack of oversight?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I am very, very pleased that Ornge has made enormous progress over the past year. I think the member opposite would acknowledge that Ornge is a much more responsive, transparent organization now than it was just a year ago.

We've got a new culture at Ornge. It is putting patients first. It is respecting taxpayers. It does respect transparency. Dr. Andrew McCallum is now firmly entrenched as the CEO at Ornge. He is an exceptionally well-qualified person for this job. The volunteer board of directors is taking their responsibility extremely seriously, Speaker.

We are very proud of the progress that we've made, and I think if you're looking for accountability, we take full accountability for the situation at Ornge.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Frank Klees: Speaker, it's not the accountability of Ornge or the transparency of Ornge we're concerned about in this question; it's about the accountability and transparency of the Ministry of Health.

The new Premier is picking up where the old Premier left off, refusing to answer questions directly on this important issue.

My question is this: Rather than hold the minister accountable, she promoted the minister to Deputy Premier. Rather than hold the deputy minister, Mr. Saâd Rafi, accountable for his failure of oversight, he got a raise. I'd like to know from this Premier: Will she conduct her administration in a more transparent, more accountable way than the former Premier, who did everything he could to deflect responses about this issue?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I'm very pleased that we have been quickly able to reintroduce legislation respecting air ambulance service in Ontario. It does strengthen oversight; it does strengthen transparency. I very, very much hope that the member opposite and his entire caucus support this bill, now Bill 11, so that we can complete the task that was given to us by the Auditor General.

There were serious problems at Ornge. The entire board is gone; the entire senior executive team is gone. It is a new era at Ornge, and this legislation is vitally important. I urge the member opposite to quit playing politics with this and get on with fixing the problem. He has an important part to play.

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question is to the Minister of Finance. In 2010, this government slashed benefits paid to Ontario drivers by 50%. These changes resulted in \$2 billion of annual savings for the auto insurance industry. This resulted in savings far more than tackling fraud alone, yet in the past two years, drivers have paid 5% more in premiums. Why won't this government commit to passing the billions of dollars in savings on to drivers in Ontario?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the question. As I've stated before, we do not want rates to

be increased any further. We recognize that we need to do better than the status quo, but let's be realistic with what we're dealing with here. The costs of claims in Ontario are 10 times higher than the costs of claims in other provinces. That relates to the cost of premiums. We've taken steps in the past to try to minimize that price increase. That's why the price only increased by 0.26% since 2006, but we need to do better than that, and I will work with the opposition from both sides to make that happen. We'll look at taking the steps necessary to get at the root causes before us. We need to do better, and we will.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary question.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, we definitely need to do much more. Everyone agrees that we need to tackle fraud, but drivers deserve a guarantee that any new recommendations implemented, any new steps taken, are connected to lower premiums for drivers in Ontario.

Over the past two years, drivers have seen their rates go up time and time again. In my meeting with industry CEOs on Friday, I made it clear to them that this is simply unacceptable. Why won't this government commit right now to reducing auto insurance rates in this province by 15% over the next year?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Let me be clear: We're taking steps to do just that. We do want to reduce rates. We do want to do better in Ontario because in relative terms to the other provinces, we are paying too much. That's the problem, because the costs are also extremely high in Ontario versus other provinces. We need to get at those issues.

But let me also be mindful here that while our rates have gone higher, but below inflation, it's not acceptable still. We need to do better. Even Sid Ryan makes a point of saying, over a "Million union members in Ont. I have not heard one say they want an election over auto insurance."

We need to work together to make this effective, and I will do that with you as well.

BRAIN RESEARCH

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I was pleased to hear in the throne speech that brain-related illnesses are a priority for this government. In my riding of Oak Ridges—Markham, I often hear—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): And you're adding, too. I'm making a list. Okay, thank you.

Question, please.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: In my riding of Oak Ridges, I often hear from my constituents how they and their families are dealing with the challenges of Alzheimer's, autism, epilepsy and mental health and addiction. I think we're all aware that Ontario is home to many world-class research institutions.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the Minister of Research and Innovation: Can the minister please let us know specifically what actions this government is taking to ensure an ongoing commitment to brain research?

Hon. Reza Moridi: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member from Oak Ridges–Markham for that question. Brain disease is a serious illness for Ontarians. One in five Ontarians, at some point in their lifetime, will develop some kind of brain disease. That's about 2.6 million people in Ontario.

That's why this government is proud to announce this morning that we are investing \$100 million over the next five years at the Ontario Brain Institute. This investment will allow the Ontario Brain Institute to expand beyond its current research scope and to develop new research into depression and neurodegeneration.

Canada is among the top five countries in the world for neuroscience research, and this is in part due to the world-class research being done right here in Ontario at the Ontario Brain Institute. Tackling these issues is critical to this government's commitment to fostering a fair society for all of us in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I'm glad that this government is continuing to invest in this critical research. It's clear that research investments have profound impacts, not only here in Ontario but throughout the world. We are making Ontario a leader in brain research and are helping to improve the health of all Ontarians. But, because of their neurological disease, many Ontarians are not achieving their full potential, and there is an impact on our economy through lost workplace productivity.

Could the minister please let us know how today's announcement will affect Ontario's economy?

Hon. Reza Moridi: I thank again the member for that insightful question. Brain diseases have devastating social impacts, but in Ontario, they also have an estimated commercial and economic impact of \$39 billion annually. Addressing these challenges will have a positive impact on Ontario's economy.

The annual global market for nervous system diagnostics and therapeutics is estimated to be \$130 billion every year and growing by 10%. We are lucky here in Ontario to be competitive in this market, with over 500 top neuroscientists conducting world-class research at the Ontario Brain Institute. It's clear that our commitment to research and innovation is strengthening Ontario's economy while ensuring we all have a fair society in this province.

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POWER PLANTS

Mr. Victor Fedeli: My question is for the Premier. Premier, we know you were briefed in 2011 on the Oakville gas plant cancellation. We know you received a cabinet document on Project Vapour. Yet you continue to say that you weren't part of any decisions on this billion-dollar scandal. Recently, you made a subtle change to say

you "weren't in the room" when those decisions were made.

Premier, your credibility on the gas plant scandal continues to vaporize thanks to your ever-changing words. You say one thing, but you do another. Enough of this charade. You owe us the documents. Will you finally turn over the secret gas plant documents to us today?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: As the honourable member is well aware, we have a committee of the Legislature which is seized with this issue and will have an opportunity to examine documents. Government members have already indicated the willingness of the government to provide all documents.

We're also very much looking forward to hearing from the opposition about their reasons for supporting the removal of the Mississauga plant, the fact that they were on the public record, everything from news releases to Twitter to YouTube to the Steve Paikin show, with the Leader of the Opposition being very clear that if he had been elected Premier, he would have cancelled it. Certainly, all of us are looking forward to the detailed policy analysis and accounting and financial work that I'm sure the Progressive Conservatives gave and I'm sure they will bring forward to the committee.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, we're not talking about what if; we're talking about what is. What is missing on these whited-out pages? What is missing in the documents from the Premier that we don't have? What is in those answers that we have questions for? What is in the OPA documents that were removed because of privilege, when privilege doesn't apply here?

We have an admission from the Premier that all documents will be released. Well, that actually means there are indeed more documents. No more what ifs; what is? What is in these secret documents, and will we have you turn over the Liberal Party documents today?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Be seated, please. Thank you.

Government House leader?

Hon. John Milloy: As I said, the committee will be dealing with all these issues, but I would have thought that the honourable member would have had more confidence in his leader's ability to have won the last election. I had a request for this today from someone. They want to hear the text of the Mississauga South PC candidate's robocall.

Here we are: "Hi there. This is Geoff Janoscik, your Mississauga South Ontario PC candidate. I'm calling about the McGuinty-Sousa power plant that the Liberal government decided to build in your backyard. I am against this power plant, and as your MPP, I will fight to stop the power plant from being built.... Our team has been out knocking on doors every single evening for several months, talking about the power plant and making sure that we defeat the Liberals in this riding and put an

end to their bad decisions. On October 6, choose change that puts our community first.”

In the words of the Leader of the Opposition when it came to the Mississauga power plant, “done, done, done.”

CASINOS

Mr. Jonah Schein: My question is to the Premier. Toronto city hall is filled with lobbyists who are pushing for a downtown casino. In fact, Toronto’s deputy mayor is so concerned, he has asked to ban lobbyists from city hall. This decision should be made by the people of Toronto, and it should not be made behind closed doors.

Speaker, will the Premier agree to hold referendums on casinos so that people can have their say?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I appreciate the question. I know the Minister of Finance will want to comment in the supplementary.

I’ve been very clear that the decision to site a casino in a municipality is up to the municipality. The decision on what kind of consultation that the municipality wants to do is up to the municipality, because different municipalities will have a different take on whether they want to have a referendum, whether they want to do a different kind of consultation. But it is up to the community to make that decision. It is not up to the provincial government; it is not up to OLG. It is up to the community. I have been very clear and consistent that that is exactly the position that we will take: We will not be interfering in those decisions.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jonah Schein: Back to the Premier: I’m hearing a no. I see that the halls of Queen’s Park and the halls of city hall are swarming with lobbyists. We keep hearing about change here at Queen’s Park, but what people in Ontario continue to see is the same status quo. We see a government that continues to put well-connected insiders before the interests of the people of this province.

When it comes to casinos, the Premier is saying the exact same thing as her predecessor. Even Mike Harris respected people enough to let them have a say by referendum before imposing a casino on their community. Why won’t this Premier agree to hold referendums on casinos so that Ontarians can have their say?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I just want to say to the member opposite that I actually have confidence in the city council of Toronto and city councils around the province to make decisions. They are elected representatives of the people of the city, and I also have confidence in the people of Toronto and the people beyond Toronto to work with their city councillors—with their representatives at the municipal level—to make those decisions.

Our responsibility as a provincial government is to give municipalities the latitude to make those decisions. If a municipality wants to hold a referendum or if a municipality wants to do another kind of consultation, they should have the right to do that. We should not be imposing those restrictions on them.

Our position is municipalities have the right to make those decisions and, as I say, I have confidence in the city council of Toronto to make those decisions.

FAMILY CAREGIVER LEAVE

Ms. Dipika Damerla: My question is to the Minister of Labour. I think we can all agree that one of the most stressful things that can take place is to have a close family member diagnosed with a serious illness, not just for the person who has been diagnosed with the illness, but also for close friends and family. We also know, in a situation like this, how important it is for our loved ones to not only get the best possible care from our health care system, but also the help and support of their family during such a difficult and trying time. We all know from personal experience how hard it can be to balance family and work at the best of times, and it can get next to impossible when somebody is really sick.

Minister, can you tell me what you are doing to ensure that the good people of Mississauga East–Cooksville do not have to choose between paying their mortgage and looking after their loved ones?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I want to thank the member for this very important question and her constant advocacy on this extremely important issue.

Our government recognizes the challenges that hard-working Ontarians face when they must provide care for a loved one while also working full-time, and we believe that the last thing Ontarians should worry about when the health of their loved one hangs in the balance is the stress of work or the fear of losing their job. That’s why our government already provides Ontarians with a personal emergency leave for up to 10 days or a family medical leave for up to eight weeks to care for a family member at risk of death.

But we know that there is a gap for those hard-working Ontarians who are increasingly caring for their elderly family members with a chronic acute medical condition, not to mention other family members facing serious illnesses that do not necessarily pose a risk of death.

I will be tabling this afternoon family caregiver legislation and I am proud that our government is following through on this commitment to Ontario’s families.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Dipika Damerla: Thank you, minister; this news will be very much welcome in my riding. I believe this is especially critical in light of the demographic challenges we face that are seeing more and more families caring for elderly parents. We know that home is the best and most preferred place for people to recover from an illness or injury, especially following a hospital stay. There is no doubt in my mind that home care helps improve an aging parent’s or a sick child’s quality of life. In addition, it frees up hospital beds and shortens wait times in emergency rooms, so it’s a win-win all around. This is all part of the government’s focus on ensuring Ontarians are getting the right care in the right place.

I'm glad to hear this legislation is being reintroduced as soon as possible, as the minister indicated. Could he tell us if the proposed bill includes any changes from the previous bill?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: As I mentioned, I am pleased to be reintroducing our family caregiver leave legislation this afternoon. These measures are something that caregivers across the province have been asking for. Extending job-protected leave to care for a loved one during a time of need is a policy that our government strongly believes is not only the right thing to do, but a real way to help our health care system support patients with the care they need in the setting that is best, often that is at home with the support of a family caregiver. It could be the crucial difference between going home, where we know it is more comfortable and better for the patient, or an extended and expensive hospital stay.

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To answer the member specifically, Speaker: There will be some new additions to the legislation to include provisions which complement the new federal measures in the Helping Families in Need Act. The proposed legislation would also provide leave for employees who are parents to care for a critically ill child or in cases where a child is missing or deceased as a probable result of a crime.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Rob Leone: My question is to the Premier. When the last PC government was in power, it was confronted with a decision to build a power plant in the western GTA. After careful consideration and discussions with local residents, our government did the responsible thing and said no to the power plants because that's the way governments are supposed to behave.

But this is a Liberal government that simply can't say no. They said yes to locating the plants where they should never have been sited, yes to cancelling those plants to save some seats, yes to wasting hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars and yes to hiding documents from the people of Ontario.

Will the Premier stand up and tell Ontarians that it was only her government that ever thought locating the plants in Oakville and Mississauga were good ideas?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: I thank the member for the question. You know the party on that side has had energy policies—has a white paper on energy. We should really examine what they're saying on that side of the House. For example, they want to privatize OPG. You know what? Ernie Eves wanted to privatize OPG, and when he tried to do it, energy prices went up 30%. Not only that, when they were managing the energy system, Tom Long, who was the Leader of the Opposition's co-campaign manager, made off with \$1.3 million in Hydro One contracts. That's the record, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the firm of the Leader of the Opposition's co-campaign man-

ager received \$250,000, which the Leader of the Opposition later called a bargain.

We have a policy that makes sense in placing our electrical generation. We will continue to do it with credibility.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Rob Leone: It takes a decision to build a power plant to come before a decision to cancel it. It takes a decision to award power plant contracts that has resulted in hundreds of millions of dollars in cancellation costs. It's taken a decision to obstruct the work of this Legislature that leads to a contempt charge on the floor of this House.

Your Liberal government made all of those decisions, Minister. Your decisions have tarnished the Liberal Party, thrown its caucus members under the bus, and the people of Ontario are left to foot the bill.

Will the Premier stand up and admit that it is her government's decisions that have left it mired in scandal, and will she apologize to the people of Ontario for bilking hundreds of millions of dollars from their pockets?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: In 2011, there was a provincial election campaign: All parties supported the relocation of the Mississauga plant. We were fortunate enough to be elected; they lost the election. We honoured that commitment. We honoured the same commitment that they made, Mr. Speaker. So we are making the right decisions. As a matter of fact, we have a community in Oakville that likes our decision. We have a community in Mississauga that likes our decision. We have a community in Sarnia-Lambton that likes our decision. We have a community in Lennox in eastern Ontario—we have four parts of the province that like the decision that we made, that was a commitment that all three parties made. We're proud of our decision, Mr. Speaker.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. Yesterday in Windsor, 200 concerned citizens gathered at the Windsor Regional Hospital to protest cuts to beds and front-line staff. This was one of more than a dozen similar protests that were held around the province, Speaker. Even though the minister says that she's okay with hospital cuts, I think it's pretty clear that the people of Windsor, and many other affected communities, are not.

Will the Premier explain to patients and front-line care workers in Windsor how cuts can possibly make for a better health care system in their community?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I do know that across the province yesterday there were Ontario Health Coalition protests in various locations. I didn't notice that they were celebrating the additional people who were being hired in the community.

You see, we are transforming our health care system. It is hard work, but people across Ontario are embracing the shift in health care spending. We are investing more in the community. We are investing more in home care. We are investing more in keeping people out of the hospital, because that's the best way to deliver care to the most number of people.

It's unfortunate that the NDP does not acknowledge that our health care system has to change. The status quo is not an option. What matters to me is that patients are getting the care they need, in the most appropriate place, as quickly as possible, and that's what our transformation does support.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: In recent weeks, the people of Windsor have learned that they're about to lose 34 nurses and that they'll never see the 48 hospital beds promised to them by the Liberal government not so very long ago. We've also heard that Maryvale children's mental health centre is being forced to cut 22 front-line care workers in a bid to shift resources from residential beds to outpatient services.

Now, more outpatient care should not—the minister needs to know this is what New Democrats think—come as a trade-off for other kinds of mental health services, particularly when everybody in Ontario acknowledges that mental health services are at a crisis low in Ontario. We need a balanced approach to addressing health care and mental health care services in the province.

Why is the Premier cutting health care staff and services first and asking questions later?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I think I want to start by talking about funding at Windsor Regional Hospital, because I think it's important to know that the funding has increased by 83% over a decade. It's \$220 million more this year, so there is an increase in funding at Windsor Regional Hospital.

When it comes to mental health and addictions, our government has done more for mental health and addictions than any government has in the past. I have to say that that work has been supported by the extraordinarily fine work of the Select Committee on Mental Health and Addictions that had membership of MPPs from all sides, chaired by the very, very capable member from Oakville.

We have made great strides. We have more to do, Speaker, but the implementation of our 10-year Mental Health and Addictions Strategy is on track and people are seeing the difference on the ground.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. Joe Dickson: My question is to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. We have many post-secondary students in the galleries today—if they're staying here. They are here at Queen's Park to talk with members from all parties about the issues facing their peers. These students are talking about the issues that we can all work together on, and I know this government is committed to helping all students in Ontario. A concern

on campuses across the province is the mental health wellness of students. We can all agree that the health of students is something we all care about.

Mr. Speaker, through you, could the minister inform the House what the government is doing to help ensure that the post-secondary students have access to the mental health supports and the services they also need?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I want to thank the member for the question. Most of all, I want to thank the students who are here today to talk to all three parties about the important issues to them taking place in our post-secondary system. The member raises an important issue, as they'll be raising it with us today, and that's the issue of mental health services on our campuses.

We've been engaged in consultations with our post-secondary education partners, student groups, as well as mental health advocacy organizations, as we chart out our government's plan to address mental health on campus. I can assure you there are a number of recommendations now that my ministry is taking a good look at. I'm looking forward to rolling out some of those initiatives in the very near future.

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In the meantime, I'd like to commend all the student groups that are involved in advocating for this important issue. I look forward to working with them to bring forward even more progress in the days ahead.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Joe Dickson: It's good to hear that our government is taking action to address this important issue facing post-secondary students.

The students here also have said that they want to know what our government is doing to assist them with another important issue. The Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance is currently calling for the first two years at all universities to be entirely transferable. For some students, this means transferring from college to university. For others, it means from one university to another. Students are mobile; so should their credits be.

Like the previous issue, I know our government is listening and taking action. Speaker, through you, could the minister update the House on the current status of the province's efforts to help students graduate faster through credit transfer agreements?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I think the students who are talking to us today about credit transfer are making some very valid points and raising some very valid concerns. It is indeed one of our government's top post-secondary education priorities because a strengthened credit transfer system reduces costs to students, to families and indeed to Ontarians and our government when it comes to the post-secondary education system.

Students have become more mobile, and the academic credits they earn should be more mobile as well. This is why in 2011 we established ONCAT, the Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer. I've heard the recommendation from the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance and I'm pleased that they've chosen a very bold and aspirational goal and objective. Each year, over

4,000 student transfers take place between colleges and universities. That's a huge increase to over 500 already-existing credit transfer articulation agreements. I look forward to working with students across this province as we continue to enhance credit transfer.

ELECTRONIC HEALTH INFORMATION

Mr. Michael Harris: My question is to the Minister of Health. Minister, last week the member for Oakville dropped a bombshell when he admitted that the Ministry of Health had failed to release all the eHealth documents requested by the estimates committee, and he didn't just make that statement once. To members' surprise, he conceded several times that the ministry is sitting on more documents related to the committee's request. However, he suddenly changed his tune about those additional documents after a Liberal staffer scolded him for his Freudian slip.

I have a simple question for you, Minister: Was the member for Oakville right or wrong when he stated that the Ministry of Health will be releasing more eHealth documents?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: I appreciate the mischief that the honourable member is trying to make. I think it's important to correct the record here. On February 20, the Legislature unanimously passed a motion to appoint committees and membership. It was supported by all members in this House. It was a unanimous motion. In the motion, it outlined that committees would be provided with documents that they had requested in the last session before the prorogation, and that they would be provided within seven sessional days.

That work is ongoing. Committees are beginning to work, and again, the various ministries will respond to the motion that's been put forward by the committees.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Michael Harris: Back to the minister: We still don't have all the documents from the ministry that we've asked for. We've got plenty of eHealth, but we're asking specifically from the ministry. I'm sure you must have cringed when you heard the comments made by the member from Oakville. Perhaps she even questioned whether it was worth a billion dollars and a gas plant cancellation to save the member's seat in the last election. I hope the minister can understand why we're all a little skeptical when we hear the Liberals claim they have complied with the House, especially when it comes to providing documents. I'll remind the minister that on two different occasions now the Liberal government was forced to retract statements falsely claiming all the gas plant documents had, in fact, been released.

So I have to ask the minister: With such a poor track record on transparency, why should anyone believe you're actually telling the truth now?

Hon. John Milloy: Unfortunately, I guess within the Progressive Conservative Party there's not a lot of com-

munication. Maybe the member from Kitchener-Conestoga should have shown up when this House unanimously passed an order giving ministries seven sessional days to bring forward documents. This was an offer made by the government so that committees did not have to go through the exercise of re-requesting the documents. I guess the honourable member wasn't aware, because the rest of his caucus stood up and agreed to it. That is exactly what the government is doing and that is exactly what ministries and agencies that have been requested are doing.

Mr. Speaker, we will comply with the order of this House and work with the committees to make sure that they can undertake their work.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is to the Minister of Education. Students at five East York schools are struggling to learn in mouldy, raccoon-invested portables because this government, this Liberal government, has reneged on its commitment to fund capital repairs at the schools in East York.

Why is the government compromising the health and safety of children in these schools by refusing to provide capital funding for these essential repairs that were in last year's provincial budget?

Hon. Liz Sandals: I think it's important to put this all in perspective, that when we look at the amount of money that this government has provided for the Toronto District School Board, since 2003 we have increased funding for the board by over 30%, to a total of over \$2 billion, at the same time that their enrolment has declined by 13%. So when we look at the funding that has been provided to the Toronto District School Board, we are doing anything but renegeing.

What is quite clear is that the Toronto District School Board, like every school board in this province, has a responsibility to make sure that it has its own capital plan to make sure that it is taking care of the repair needs in its schools.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: It's very clear that the minister is seeking to shift the blame to the Toronto District School Board, and I am not sure that's where it is, because the ministry officials, in last year's budget, were very, very clear that the money was available and was needed by the Toronto District School Board, particularly in these underserviced schools. A Toronto Star editorial said it best: "The ministry needs to protect children who will otherwise spend their elementary years in overcrowded, rundown portables."

Parents are meeting tonight and demand answers. Is the answer they're going to get the one they just got, or when will this government finally commit on the urgent request to protect these 800 East York children who deserve so much better from this ministry?

Hon. Liz Sandals: I think we need to acknowledge that there has been a significant history of the Toronto

District School Board having challenges with its capital planning process, with its capital portfolio, despite the funding that has been provided by the Ministry of Education.

Because there have been historic problems, we have actually provided a special assistance team to go into the Toronto District School Board and work with the Toronto District School Board, the trustees and the senior administration to come up with a new capital plan that will provide for, as we go forward, both new accommodation but also to do the maintenance that is required in the schools. I have met with that special assistance review team, and I know that they have a number of proposals for the Toronto trustees.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1149 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's my honour to present Maria Daskalos and Jim Parthenis, who are here today on a very important matter of concern to this Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you, and welcome.

Introductions of guests?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I don't think she is here yet, but I do want to introduce Joanne Di Nardo, the senior manager of the Canadian Cancer Society, Ontario division, who's here in support of the bill that I'll be introducing relating to family caregiver leave. So, welcome to her whenever she arrives. Thank you.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We welcome all our guests, regardless of whether they're here or not.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Mr. Speaker, as you know, last summer, parts of Ontario suffered through severe drought. When I toured Renfrew, I saw fields of corn where there wasn't a plant over 10 inches at the end of July, and farmers who were frustrated and worried they wouldn't have enough to feed their livestock.

I want to commend all the farmers and organizations that came together to form HayEast, which brought hay from western Canada to help farmers get through this difficult winter. It is wonderful to see people working together: the generosity of western farmers who donated their hay, people who transported it at cost and those in Ontario who came to help with the cost.

But farmers buying hay because of the drought are now facing another challenge. The government program designed to assist them with transporting the hay from the long distances doesn't work. Farmers will be feeding their livestock the purchased hay until May, but the

program only covers expenses to March 15. Mr. Speaker, it doesn't make sense that the program ends before the problem does. During the six or seven weeks after the deadline, many farmers will transport purchased hay from long distance at great expense, but it won't be covered.

I wrote to the Premier last week and asked her to extend the AgriRecovery program to mid-May. The deadline is now less than two weeks away, so I ask the Premier again to extend the program, go to eastern Ontario, visit the farms that have been impacted and hear from the farmers first-hand to make sure the program actually works for them. I'm going to talk with them in person, and I hope, Minister, you will, too.

HAMILTON SPECIAL OLYMPICS SKATING CLUB

Miss Monique Taylor: In January, I had the great pleasure of attending a send-off night for the skaters from the Hamilton Special Olympics Skating Club who are heading to the Special Olympics World Winter Games in Pyeongchang, South Korea.

Sara McKelvie, David Robertson, Tim Goodacre and Jessica Young were embarking on the trip of a lifetime with their dedicated coaches, Michelle Petullio, Kathy Sitak, Jenna Smith and Amanda Marazia.

The event was hosted by the Dofasco Skating Club and was a great night, filled with hope and optimism.

I was so pleased to congratulate our Special Olympics skaters—dedicated athletes who accomplish so much.

Their trip to South Korea was no exception. Sara won gold in solo and another in dance. David won silver in solo and another silver in dance. Tim won bronze in solo and silver in pairs. Jessica won silver in pairs and placed fourth in solo.

David and Jessica also had the honour of skating in the closing ceremonies, along with Michelle Kwan and Yuna Kim.

We're very proud of the Hamilton club's success. It is recognized for its excellence, and no other club in the world sent four skaters to South Korea.

Congratulations to all the athletes and their coaches, but I also want to put a special thank you in to Hamilton Special Olympics Skating Club coach Frank Sullivan for his commitment to the Special Olympians and for giving me the privilege of spending some time with them.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: I'm pleased to rise in the House today to share some important news in the domain of consumer protection.

Across Canada, Speaker, as you may know, March is recognized as Fraud Prevention Month. In Ontario, the Ministry of Consumer Services is at work every day to inform and educate consumers and businesses across the province. The goal, of course, is to provide a fair, safe and informed marketplace, where consumer rights are

fully protected against all kinds of undesirable business practices, of course including fraud.

Last week, Ontario's Minister of Consumer Services joined the Toronto Police Service to launch Fraud Prevention Month. The launch included partners such as the Insurance Bureau of Canada, the Ontario Provincial Police, the Bank of Canada, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Crime Prevention Association of Toronto, amongst a number of others. These organizations illustrate just how wide-ranging fraud and scams unfortunately continue to be in our society, and they illustrate how much we can accomplish together to raise awareness and educate consumers. Protecting consumers, of course, builds confidence, and building confidence in their transactions through preventing fraud helps promote healthy economic growth in this province.

I urge my fellow parliamentarians and this entire House and Legislature to join the Ministry of Consumer Services in recognizing March as Fraud Prevention Month, and to join us in our efforts to make our province's marketplace fair, safe and equitable for all.

BREAST CANCER

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I know we've heard much about the challenges in our schools we are facing lately, but today I am pleased to rise and acknowledge two high school teachers and their students at Robert F. Hall secondary school in Caledon. A group of students are heading to New York this week to perform in their own musical called *In the Pink* at the off-Broadway theatre New World Stages. The performance is scheduled for Tuesday, March 12.

The story, which is co-written by teachers Rob Cicottelli and Frank Adriano, involves a group of 10 performers who tackle the issue of teenage breast cancer. *In the Pink* challenges some common perceptions about breast cancer and highlights the impact that the disease can have on young women. According to the Canadian Cancer Society, in 2012 over 22,000 women and 200 men were diagnosed with breast cancer. The students and their teachers at Robert F. Hall believe that it is a topic that must be discussed at the high school level, and this musical attempts to do so in a thought-provoking, entertaining and informative way.

The production has caught the attention of the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation, who sponsored the show and has been very supportive of the drama students during the development of the play. As a precursor to their New York debut, the actors took to the stage to perform *In the Pink* in Mississauga this week. Box office proceeds from the show will go to the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation.

Rob Cicottelli, Frank Adriano and the Robert F. Hall drama students who participated both onstage and off-stage in the making of this production are to be congratulated for tackling the subject of breast cancer with intelligence and compassion. I wish them all the very best of luck in their big debut in New York City next week.

DIMITRA DASKALOS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Once again, I rise in the Legislature to mark the anniversary of the tragic death of Dimitra Daskalos. Once again, her daughter Maria is here to ask for justice for her mother. Maria has spent the last two years fighting for hospital accountability.

Maria has been engaged in back-and-forth letter-writing for years with the hospital, ministry staff and the Premier's office. The hospital caused extreme hardship and suffering to Dimitra Daskalos and her family at a time when compassion and care were required. The family believes that infection-control protocol was breached and has repeatedly asked for an investigation. She has been stonewalled by both the government and the hospital. Maria and her family collected 5,400 signatures in a petition asking for Ombudsman oversight, which was presented in this Legislature.

The Ombudsman's bid for jurisdiction to investigate complaints about patients' experience at the province's hospitals and long-term-care facilities has support from a wide range of patient advocacy groups. This would be viewed as a positive step by almost everyone except this government; as an example, I point to the omission of Ombudsman oversight of Ornge and Bill 11. It is unconscionable that Maria Daskalos has to be in this House again requesting justice for her mother. It is time for the Minister of Health to take responsibility and order an investigation.

JEAN FRASER

Ms. Soo Wong: I would like to take some time today to recognize a member of my riding of Scarborough-Agincourt. Jean Fraser is a role model for everyone in this House and is watching us today. Over the last century, and even now, she continues to contribute to our community in a meaningful way. Yes, Mr. Speaker, you heard it correctly: I said "over a century." On February 8 of this year, Jean Fraser turned 100 years old.

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Jean has been volunteering at the Sunshine Centres for Seniors, which help isolated and frail seniors who are at risk for depression and need to be connected to a supportive community. This particular riding also has Camp Sunshine, which aims to enhance the quality of life of seniors.

Jean has been volunteering at the Sunshine Centres since 1996, when she was 83 years old. She has brought her talents to Camp Sunshine, where she has grown to be a strong leader, a dependable volunteer and an amazing friend to other seniors.

Today I would like to celebrate and recognize Jean's contributions to our community, and thank her for her warmth, kindness and goodwill, with which she actively contributes and makes a positive difference to Camp Sunshine and to my riding of Scarborough-Agincourt.

I'd also like to congratulate her on turning 100 years young. She's an inspiration and role model to all of us around her.

TAXATION

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Members' statements? The member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Thank you very much, Speaker. I have to also congratulate you on doing that title so well.

Speaker, taxes are the largest part of a family's budget. Under Liberal governments, they only go one way, and that's up. That's why, in 1999, the Harris government introduced the Taxpayer Protection Act. The goal of the act was to make the government directly responsible to the people for new taxes. Because of the large impact that taxes have on a family's budget, the act required new taxes to be voted on by the public before they were enacted.

The Liberals have subverted the act in every possible way. Using the "notwithstanding" clause, they have gutted it and made it useless. I understand that they may disrespect taxpayers, but they should at least have the respect to repeal the act that they so disagree with.

This afternoon I'll be introducing a bill to strengthen the Taxpayer Protection Act, to better protect Ontario taxpayers, and to remove that "notwithstanding" clause from the act. My bill will return the Taxpayer Protection Act to its original goal: protecting the hard-earned money of Ontario workers. It will force the government to call a referendum if they want to make changes to the act.

No matter what, Ontario taxpayers will have a say, and Liberal attempts to fleece even more money out of Ontarians must be stopped.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I have a feeling the member knows already what I'm going to say, so I'm going to provide him an opportunity to withdraw before I ask him to.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I withdraw, Speaker.

DISASTER RELIEF FOR CONMEE

Mr. Bill Mauro: Conmee is a community just west of Thunder Bay in my riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan. People might be more familiar with Kakabeka Falls and Oliver Paipoonge. If you go through Kakabeka Falls, you find yourself in Conmee quite quickly. It's a very small community: about 760 people and about 200 to 230 households.

In May 2012, Thunder Bay and region, including Conmee, was hit by what many are calling a 100-year flood and, of course, they suffered severe damage to their infrastructure, their roads and their bridges.

A few days after that, I was able to tour the damage with Reeve Kevin Holland. Speaker, I'm very pleased to say that the former Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and now the Premier, Kathleen Wynne, showed up in Thunder Bay within about eight days after the disaster hit and announced about \$16 million in funding relief through ODRAP at Saint Peter's church in the east end. We were very pleased to have her for that. The relief was for Thunder Bay–Atikokan, Thunder Bay, Oliver Paipoonge and Conmee.

Speaker, Conmee's original estimate came in at about \$800,000, but in working with the ministry, that number has now been revised. Very recently, at the ROMA/OGRA conference—the Rural Ontario Municipal Association—I was very pleased to meet with Reeve Holland, CAO Maxwell, and Councillor MacMaster so that we could share the great news with them about the revised number, having worked with them, increasing the \$800,000 number by \$1.2 million to a total of \$2 million for Conmee to help them with their roads and their bridges as a result of that disaster.

I want to thank everybody involved for their work—great news for Conmee in my riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan.

WIND TURBINES

Ms. Laurie Scott: Last Saturday I had the privilege of attending a rally of about 200 local residents in Bethany in my riding of Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock. They came out in sub-zero temperatures for one reason: They were there to present me with the latest three boxes filled with petitions, letters and emails in opposition to the proposed industrial wind turbines at Sumac Ridge, Settler's Landing and Snowy Ridge. They were joined by MP Barry Devolin and broadcaster Dale Goldhawk, both of whom spoke against these projects.

For four years the community has been fighting these proposals. Much of the credit for mobilizing the members should go to Councillor Heather Stuble of the city of Kawartha Lakes and Paul Reid of Manvers Wind Concerns, two tireless crusaders. They have been supported throughout by their local municipal councils.

Citizens have turned up en masse at public meetings, rallies and open houses, making it very clear to the proponents and this government that these wind turbines are not wanted in their community.

As I said in my remarks on Saturday, the Premier made it clear in her throne speech that these projects should go to willing communities. This is clearly not a willing community, and the government should abide by its commitments in the throne speech and deny the applications as soon as possible.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

TAXPAYER PROTECTION AMENDMENT ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA PROTECTION DES CONTRIBUABLES

Mr. Hillier moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 19, An Act to amend the Taxpayer Protection Act, 1999 / Projet de loi 19, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1999 sur la protection des contribuables.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm absolutely sure the member wants to hear his bill.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Speaker, the Taxpayer Protection Act, 1999, presently contains restrictions on introducing a government bill to increase or permit the increase of a tax rate under a tax statute designated under the act or to give a body or a person, other than the crown, the authority to change a tax rate in a designated tax statute or to levy a new tax.

This bill amends the act to extend those restrictions to a bill that amends those restrictions or that repeals the act. This bill also removes the present exemption from those requirements for a bill that gives a municipality the authority to levy a new tax.

RESPECT FOR MUNICIPALITIES ACT
(CITY OF TORONTO), 2013
LOI DE 2013 SUR LE RESPECT
DES MUNICIPALITÉS
(CITÉ DE TORONTO)

Mr. Marchese moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 20, An Act respecting the City of Toronto and the Ontario Municipal Board / Projet de loi 20, Loi portant sur la cité de Toronto et la Commission des affaires municipales de l'Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: My bill, in short, would free Toronto from the Ontario Municipal Board. The bill changes the relationship in law between the city of Toronto and the Ontario Municipal Board. Currently, under various statutes that govern land-use planning, certain municipal decisions can be appealed to the Ontario Municipal Board. Amendments eliminate those rights of appeal with respect to decisions of the city of Toronto. Amendments also eliminate a right to make certain other types of applications to the board with respect to the city. The city is authorized to establish one or more appeal bodies to hear any of these matters and to hear such other matters as the city considers appropriate.

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EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS
AMENDMENT ACT
(LEAVES TO HELP FAMILIES), 2013
LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT
LA LOI SUR LES NORMES D'EMPLOI
(CONGÉS POUR AIDER LES FAMILLES)

Mr. Naqvi moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 21, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 in respect of family caregiver, critically ill child care and crime-related child death or disappearance leaves of absence / Projet de loi 21, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi en ce qui concerne le congé familial pour les aidants naturels, le congé pour soins à un enfant gravement malade et le congé en cas de décès ou de disparition d'un enfant dans des circonstances criminelles.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'll wait. I don't know what everybody ate for supper or breakfast or lunch or whatever.

The member for a short statement.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, I'll make my statement during ministerial statements.

HELPING ONTARIANS ENTER
THE SKILLED TRADES ACT, 2013
LOI DE 2013 VISANT
À FACILITER L'ACCÈS AUX MÉTIERS
SPÉCIALISÉS EN ONTARIO

Mr. Dunlop moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 22, An Act to amend the Trades Qualification and Apprenticeship Act / Projet de loi 22, Loi modifiant la Loi sur la qualification professionnelle et l'apprentissage des gens de métier.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: This bill amends the Trades Qualification and Apprenticeship Act to specify that no more than one person may be apprenticed to each journeyperson of an employer in a trade, and to remove the power to make regulations respecting the ratio of apprentices to journeypersons who may be employed by an employer in a trade.

Mr. Speaker, the short title of the bill will be Helping Ontarians Enter the Skilled Trades Act, 2013.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I believe we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent to put a motion. Is it agreed? Agreed.

Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I move that, notwithstanding standing order 98(g), notice for ballot item 12 be waived.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE POLICY

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I believe we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice with respect to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy, and that the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of this motion without further debate or amendment.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent. Agreed? Agreed.

Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: I move that, pursuant to standing order 110(a), the Standing Committee on Justice Policy shall be authorized to consider and report its observations and recommendations concerning the tendering, planning, commissioning, cancellation and relocation of the Mississauga and Oakville gas plants;

That the committee be authorized to consider all documents filed with the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly by the Minister of Energy, the Ministry of Energy and the Ontario Power Authority on September 24 and October 12, 2012, and February 21, 2013, and that such documents be deemed to have been ordered by that committee;

That, notwithstanding standing order 108(h), the committee be authorized to consider any report prepared by the Auditor General with respect to the cancellation and relocation of the Mississauga and Oakville gas plants;

That, pursuant to standing order 110(b), where the committee exercises its authority to send for persons, each party shall be entitled to an equal number of witnesses; and

That these terms of reference shall be incorporated into the terms of reference for the Standing Committee on Justice Policy adopted by the House on February 20, 2013.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It is my understanding that the parties are familiar with the motion.

Agreed? Agreed.

Motion agreed to.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

CANADIAN AGRICULTURE LITERACY WEEK

SEMAINE DE SENSIBILISATION À L'AGRICULTURE CANADIENNE

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, it's my honour to stand in the Legislature today to recognize the

second annual Canadian Agriculture Literacy Week. From March 4 to March 8, elementary school and high school students across Canada, from British Columbia to Newfoundland, are getting a chance to learn about the importance of agriculture in our daily lives—including agricultural terms, I would say to the member opposite.

Monsieur le Président, l'industrie agricole de l'Ontario est un important contributeur à la santé de la province, tant notre santé économique que la santé de notre population.

There are more than 200 agri-food commodities produced in Ontario, and last year agriculture and agri-food contributed \$34 billion to Ontario's GDP and supported more than 700,000 jobs across the province. Ontario's food processors purchase about 65% of the good things that are produced on our farms.

Mr. Speaker, when our agri-food industry thrives, all of the people of Ontario benefit, because a thriving agri-food industry contributes to a strong economy that creates jobs and a society where every person is able to contribute and flourish. That's why I'm so pleased to take on this portfolio. It's important to me that people in our cities and towns understand and appreciate where their food comes from. It is important for our farmers, it's important for our communities and it's important for our families.

I'm so pleased that, throughout this week, Ontario students are learning about agriculture in Ontario. Activities in classrooms across the province are helping students gain an understanding of the agriculture industry and where their food comes from.

Des activités qui se déroulent dans les classes de l'ensemble de la province aident les élèves à avoir une meilleure compréhension de l'industrie agricole, de même que d'où proviennent les aliments qu'ils consomment.

It's an excellent opportunity for teachers and students to inject agricultural awareness into elementary and secondary classrooms across the country. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the folks at Ontario Agri-Food Education for their hard work and dedication to bringing focus to Canadian Agriculture Literacy Week and for sharing material with teachers. It's through initiatives like this that we can all work together to highlight the importance of Ontario's agri-food industry and we can show the connection between our rural and urban communities as we bring agriculture alive for our young people.

Célébrons donc ensemble la Semaine de sensibilisation à l'agriculture canadienne et remercions Ontario Agri-Food Education de son beau travail.

Please join me in celebrating Canadian Agriculture Literacy Week and thanking Ontario Agri-Food Education for their great work. Merci.

FAMILY CAREGIVER LEAVE

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: It is a pleasure to rise in the House to introduce our proposed Employment Standards

Amendment Act (Leaves to help Families), 2013. I want to welcome Joanne Di Nardo from the Canadian Cancer Society for being here in the House as well.

This legislation is about compassion and making it possible for every working man and woman to meet the commitments we all have to our families when a crisis occurs. Our proposed new family caregiver leave would allow Ontarians the one thing they need most when it comes to caring for family members who have a serious medical condition: time to be with their loved ones. This bill is for the young working family or single parent who needs to care for their child in hospital with a critical illness. It is for the husband seeing his wife through a difficult period of chemotherapy. It is for a working adult helping to care for their elderly parent recovering from a broken hip.

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The bill provides unpaid leaves which tie into the federal employment insurance benefits already available for parents dealing with the critical illness of a child. Our bill also provides unpaid leaves for parents in tragic situations, where their child is missing or dies as a result of a crime. This is an additional support for these parents who are now eligible for federal employment insurance benefits.

Speaker, our proposed family caregiver leave would build on Ontario's family medical leave and would provide up to eight weeks of unpaid job-protected leave to employees to care for family members with a serious medical condition.

We all know that caring for a loved one is a priority. In order to provide this care, many caregivers take time off work at the risk of losing their jobs in such difficult circumstances, or they continue working, wearing themselves down. They work during the day and care for their family at night, all the while suffering extreme stress that impacts their mental and physical health and their productivity.

I think we can all agree that no one should risk losing their job in such difficult circumstances, especially in these challenging economic times. So we are taking steps to protect those jobs and ensure that caregivers are able to focus on what matters the most: providing support to their loved ones. This bill is our way of saying to the people of this province that we will help protect you as you protect your loved ones or as you cope with an unthinkable tragedy such as a murdered or missing child.

We know Canada's population is aging. That's why, earlier this year, our government announced Ontario's Action Plan for Seniors. A commitment under that plan was to reintroduce this important legislation so that families could take the time they need to care for their loved ones as they age. Today, we are following through on that commitment. Aging at home is important to many seniors who want to be with their families. Family caregiver leave would help more of these elderly Ontarians recover from illnesses or injuries at home by allowing caregivers time off work.

This legislation also supports the new Ontario government's focus on putting patients first and delivering the right care at the right time and in the right place. When a family member is sick, home is where they want to be. Home care is more comfortable, more convenient and can improve recovery from illness or injury. After a hospital stay, home care helps an aging parent or a sick child's quality of life. It also frees up hospital beds and helps shorten wait times in hospitals and emergency rooms.

In the end, Speaker, this legislation is about compassion and helping alleviate the stress faced by caregivers during an already very stressful and emotional time. Our proposed leave would provide these caregivers the comfort of knowing their jobs are secure. This legislation simply says that we believe in families and that family caregivers need and deserve to be cared for, too.

CONDOMINIUM LEGISLATION

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I'm very pleased to rise in the House this afternoon to report on the important steps our government is taking to review Ontario's Condominium Act, 1998. This month, we will begin the second of a three-stage collaborative public engagement process of the Condominium Act review.

The condominium market has changed dramatically since the act came into effect over a decade ago. Today, about 1.3 million Ontarians—a number equal to the population of Manitoba and almost 10% of the population of the province of Ontario—are living in condominiums, and more than half of the new homes built in Ontario are indeed condominiums.

That's why, over the past six months, we have undertaken a comprehensive review of the legislation that governs the rights and responsibilities of condominium owners, developers, corporations and boards of directors and establishes a number of protections for buyers.

In stage 1, working with Canada's Public Policy Forum—recognized leaders in innovative public engagement—we asked Ontario's condominium community to tell us what they thought of the act. We asked them, and we heard from the following: more than 500 people at five public information sessions across Ontario, including one I hosted in my riding of Pickering-Scarborough East; a residents' panel—36 condominium owners and residents, randomly selected from across all of Ontario; also, a 25-member stakeholders' round table; and the people and the organizations who sent over 400 emails, including 180 submissions, to the Ministry of Consumer Services.

This process was not limited to existing condominium owners or stakeholders. Every citizen of Ontario was invited to participate, and indeed hundreds of them did just that—hundreds.

Members of the Ontario condominium community, including owners and prospective owners, residents, board members, developers, managers, lawyers, people with an interest in the sector, and others, shared their

issues with us and their ideas for solving the problems. Permit me to summarize a few of them.

People want to see improved qualifications and professional standards for condominium managers. They also seek support for condominium boards of directors, including knowledge of the act and their rights and responsibilities, particularly for first-time directors.

They seek more efficient means of resolving disputes between owners and boards of directors, including the enforcement of rules and their responsibilities as set out in the Condominium Act.

They want sales documents for condo units to be supported by summaries that are clear and explain key information to the buyers.

As well, members of the residents' panel proposed seven core values that should guide the changes to the act that will be coming forward. These are: well-being, fairness, informed community members and stakeholders, responsiveness, strong communities, financial sustainability and, last but not least, effective communications.

There are some issues we can move on—perhaps some quicker than others, where there's consensus. The general level of agreement that exists within the condo community is very encouraging to see, and this review is being driven by the very people who will be affected by the results.

Mr. Speaker, this collaborative public engagement process has given us the kind of grassroots input that is at the very heart of a democratic process, and it continues. This past January, the Public Policy Forum released a report of all the findings from stage 1 of the review, and we are accepting public comment on the report until March 11 of this month. The public can provide comments at any time during the review.

Starting this month, in stage 2, experts in condominium issues will review the report and the public comment it generates. They will expand on the work developed, and options will be put forward for recommendations to update the act. The experts represent a diverse spectrum in the condominium sector. Their options and recommendations report is expected to be available for public comment by the end of this summer.

At that point, we will be ready to begin the third and final stage of our condo act review. In stage 3, we'll convene the residents' panel once again to review the experts' options and recommendations report. Condominium residents and other stakeholders will have the opportunity to review and provide comments in the fall of this year, before it's presented to government and the condominium sector.

In the end, we all want a condominium market that is safe and well informed. We need to get this right so that we have long-term solutions as well as perhaps some short-term wins here. We are confident that the people of this province will continue to work with us to achieve that very end. Thank you very much.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Statements by ministries? Seeing no further, it's now time for responses.

CANADIAN AGRICULTURE LITERACY WEEK

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise to recognize agriculture literacy week. I think it's great that the students in our schools have the opportunity this week to learn more about the contributions of our farmers. We know how hard they work and the challenges they face. We know how much we depend on them for the food we eat and the products we use every day.

I'm especially pleased to hear the new Minister of Agriculture and Food rise and talk about the importance of agriculture literacy, because so far her government's record has been disappointing.

A recent study by Farmers Feed Cities found that only 41% of 18- to 34-year-olds claim to be aware of where their food is grown. Many people were hoping that the local food act would include food literacy, which would in part address this. But instead, we had a bill that had nothing concrete and died on the order paper only days after it was introduced.

Our farmers are struggling with red tape and spiralling hydro costs. A couple of years ago, I had the sad experience of bringing a group of new farmers to this Legislature. They felt forgotten by their government. They were all telling their children to look for other careers.

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That's not the future we want for agriculture in Ontario. We want parents to tell their children about the great opportunities in agriculture. We want students to learn about it and consider a career as a farmer, a veterinarian, a crop adviser. We want an agriculture industry—we want to celebrate that agriculture industry, not just this week but throughout the year.

FAMILY CAREGIVER LEAVE

Mr. Randy Hillier: There's a good way to do public policy and a wrong way to do public policy. Fifteen months ago, a previous incarnation of this bill was presented to the House. It was an awful bill, filled with holes, inconsistencies and contradictions, and pulled together at the last minute to have some legislation after the last election. That's not the way to do public policy.

You know, it's amazing what 15 months of thinking, considering and deliberations and hearing criticisms from your opponents' side can do. The bill tabled today by the minister is a much better bill. It seems to have addressed the concerns of the PC caucus. Unlike the prior bill, this one will close up the many inconsistencies with the federal labour code. It will introduce the sensible changes made by the federal Conservative Party to Ontario.

Unfortunately, the family caregiver leave section of the bill still has some holes. There are no parameters defining what's serious and what isn't. Additionally, the act still doesn't have a way of dealing with the federal government on that issue.

Though there are some things in the bill which could be worked through in the committee process, this act is a

great improvement, and I look forward, with the PC caucus, to working with the minister.

CONDOMINIUM LEGISLATION

Mr. Jim McDonell: With great interest, I listened this morning on the condominiums. This is something that I have heard over the last year that I've been here. Stakeholders have been asking for this for many years, and they have some key issues: minimum qualifications for managers, transparency in reserve fund management, training and support for boards of directors, clarifying the act, clarifying declarations and bylaws, and ensuring that buyers are aware of their responsibilities in the community.

Clearly, this is an area of the province that has grown tremendously since 1998. The industry has a chance to mature, but we're seeing that legislation has grievously fallen behind. These stakeholders have been looking for their chance for input, so we're glad to see the input. The study has been started. We've seen stage 1 done. We're anxious to see stage 2 and on to stage 3, and actually, we're anxious to see if this government will actually act this time.

Numerous times before, we have seen action but it's been retracted, or prorogued, and it died on the order table. Let's see the concerns of this important industry actually dealt with this time. It's quickly becoming over 50% of the market of all new homes, so we can see that in the city of Toronto, this is a huge issue and something that needs to be dealt with soon. We look forward to seeing this and hope that it finally comes, legislation that actually deals with many issues of this concerned group.

CANADIAN AGRICULTURE LITERACY WEEK

Mr. John Vanthof: It's my honour today to stand in the Legislature and speak on behalf of my New Democratic colleagues regarding agriculture awareness week. This is a week that's dedicated to showing Canadian students the importance of agriculture in our daily lives in Ontario. In Ontario, the fine folks at OAFE, Ontario Agri-Food Education Inc., play a leading role in this. Finally, everyone has realized how big a role agriculture plays in Ontario: There are 700,000 jobs. A lot of people don't realize that.

But maybe, probably, legislators should also take a few lessons in agriculture awareness week, because as we speak, we pave over 125,000 acres of agricultural land every year, and like a lot of people say, they don't make that stuff anymore.

It's ironic that we're talking about agriculture awareness week as rural schools are closing; those are the places where future vets, future feed advisers, future farmers, future ag ambassadors are created. So it's our sincere hope in the New Democratic Party that people will, in this Legislature and outside, actually take agriculture seriously. We're hoping to work with the new

Minister of Agriculture, because there are a lot of things that we could do, but in a lot of areas, as we pave over land, as small businesses close because the regulations don't equal the risks, we have to take those things into account so our kids can also enjoy agriculture.

FAMILY CAREGIVER LEAVE

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm pleased to add comments on behalf of our party on the Family Caregiver Leave Act, a bill that was presented in the last session and died with prorogation. New Democrats originally agreed with the intent and the premise of the bill, which is of course to enshrine protection in the Employment Standards Act for those family members who are seeking leave to provide care for those within their family who need it. It's something that I think is a generally accepted point of view, and something that we think should be a given, really. If you take the scenario as to whether a family member, a parent, would need to quit or leave their job if a child was critically ill, it should be a given that any employer would extend that type of a leave to a family member. What this does, of course, is enshrine that into law.

What we're concerned about here and what we'd like to see addressed at committee are some other measures of flexibility within the bill that address the changing need and the demographics, where it might not be that family members need to take a full week off. They may need to, in fact, take two or three days at a time, or a Monday, Wednesday and Thursday, or Friday, to provide just small amounts of care to a demographic that we know will need it.

As we struggle to address the important issues of home care and support for our elderly population in this province, I would hope that the government will take those considerations seriously.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to seeing this work its way through committee and I look forward to adding our party's additions to it.

CONDOMINIUM LEGISLATION

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I want to congratulate the minister on her new portfolio.

It is good that we finally have something to talk about, because for four long years I introduced changes to the Condominium Act, and for four painful, long years, each minister who was in that portfolio said, "The system is working."

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I remember the Attorney General, who was the then minister, said, "The system is working just fine." Other ministers said the system was working just fine. They were all wrong. The system was not working, and we needed changes. We finally have one, and we've begun the review. The Lord can be merciful from time to time.

On the whole, that review is okay, but I got to tell you I've got some problems with what's not there. What's not

there is the following: Tarion, the agency that deals with warranties, is not even mentioned. It is an agency that is controlled by developers. There is not one mention of Tarion and the influence of developers on that agency.

Secondly, there's reference to tribunals but only reference to a tribunal, and in order to get consumer protection we need to have a tribunal where people can go when they have a grievance to get a problem solved. That's a serious oversight, in my view.

The third is that there is no mention of bad development or bad developers. They are absolutely missing in that review. How can we protect consumers when we don't talk at all about bad developers and bad development?

I'm looking forward to making sure that we address those three in particular, as we do the ongoing review.

PETITIONS

HOSPITAL PARKING FEES

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present a petition from the riding of Durham that reads as follows:

"Whereas the United Senior Citizens of Ontario has expressed its concerns over the high costs of parking at hospitals in Ontario on behalf of its more than 300,000 members; and

"Whereas thousands of Ontario seniors find it difficult to live on their fixed income and cannot afford these extra hospital parking fees added to their daily living costs; and

"Whereas the Canadian Medical Association Journal has said in an editorial that parking fees are a barrier to health care and add additional stress to patients who have enough to deal with;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That Ontario's members of provincial Parliament and the" Kathleen Wynne "government take action to abolish parking fees for all seniors when visiting hospitals."

I'm pleased to present this to Jessica, one of the pages in their last few days here.

1550

ANIMAL PROTECTION

Ms. Sarah Campbell: I have a petition here that's signed by over 600 people from the northwest. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the process popularly known as 'declawing' is actually an amputation of a cat's toes that is both painful and unnecessary;

"Whereas research has shown declawing a cat significantly reduces a cat's quality of life and leads to both behavioural and health problems;

"Whereas declawing removes a cat's natural defences and leaves them helpless in situations where their life may be in danger;

"Whereas most reputable cat shelters have a no-declawing policy, due to the permanent damage it causes; and

"Whereas the process is considered to be inhumane and is banned in many jurisdictions;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To ban the unnecessary and inhumane medical procedure known as declawing in the province of Ontario."

I support this and will be giving it to page Jasmine to deliver.

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. Steve Clark: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that reads as follows:

"Whereas the price of gas is reaching historic levels and is expected to increase another 15% in the near future, yet oil prices are dropping; and

"Whereas the" McGuinty-Wynne "government has done nothing to protect consumers from high gas prices; and

"Whereas the high and unstable gas prices across Ontario have caused confusion and unfair hardship to Ontario drivers while also impacting the Ontario economy in key sectors such as tourism and transportation; and

"Whereas the high price of gas has a detrimental impact on all aspects of our already troubled economy and substantially increases the price of delivered commodities, adding further burden to Ontario consumers;

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and urge the Premier to take action to protect consumers from the burden of high gas prices in Ontario."

I'm pleased to affix my signature and send it to the table with page Vanessa.

ANIMAL PROTECTION

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the process popularly known as 'declawing' is actually an amputation of a cat's toes that is both painful and unnecessary;

"Whereas research has shown declawing a cat significantly reduces a cat's quality of life and leads to both behavioural and health problems;

"Whereas declawing removes a cat's natural defences and leaves them helpless in situations where their life may be in danger;

"Whereas most reputable cat shelters have a no-declawing policy, due to the permanent damage it causes; and

"Whereas the process is considered to be inhumane and is banned in many jurisdictions;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To ban the unnecessary and inhumane medical procedure known as declawing in the province of Ontario.”

I give this petition to Justin.

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Jim Wilson: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas we, the residents of Clearview township and neighbouring townships, oppose the wpd Canada Fairview wind project on Fairgrounds Road and all wind energy projects in Clearview township; and

“Whereas we support the petition of mayors and councillors from 80 municipalities, farm organizations, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture and the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario, which petition requested that the province place an immediate moratorium on all wind projects until an independent and comprehensive health study has determined that turbine noise is safe to human health, amongst other things; and

“Whereas wpd Canada’s Fairview wind project violates the OLS airspace and usability of registered aerodromes in Clearview, including Collingwood Regional Airport and Stayner field, and wpd Canada’s draft renewal energy approvals reports do not recognize these impacts or the jurisdiction of the government of Canada; and

“Whereas wpd Canada is seeking final approval from the province for the Fairview wind project prior to completion of the federal Health Canada study and prior to federal actions to protect aviation safety;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the government of Ontario agree and accept that until the federal health study is completed and federal aeronautical zoning is in place, that it will immediately take whatever action is necessary to give full effect to a moratorium on all wind turbine development in Ontario, including all projects for which final approvals have not been given.”

I’m pleased to sign this petition as I agree with it. In fact, I was just on Sun TV taping a program about this topic which will air at 5 o’clock tonight and 10 o’clock tonight.

ONTARIO NORTHLAND

Mr. Victor Fedeli: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas without an integrated plan to grow the economy and balance the budget, our province will continue to face historic deficits and fail to create jobs, especially in northeastern Ontario; and

“Whereas consultations this summer revealed that businesses are not expanding and hiring because of uncertainty surrounding the sale of the ONTC freight

division and the handling of the divestiture of the ONTC; and

“Whereas infrastructure like the ONTC freight division is important to northern job creation;

“We, the undersigned, do hereby petition the government of Ontario to:

“—replace the government’s current ham-fisted fire sale of the ONTC with a strategic asset review of all ONTC assets, operations and services including full consultation with northern municipal and business leaders;

“—ensure Ontario Northland’s rail freight division remains publicly owned; ...

“—appoint an ONTC board of directors based on transportation and business expertise, not patronage.”

I agree with this petition, sign my name to it and give it to page A.J.

ONTARIO COLLEGE OF TRADES

Mr. Jim McDonell: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario’s tradespeople are subject to stifling regulation and are compelled to pay membership fees to the unaccountable College of Trades; and

“Whereas these fees are a tax grab that drives down the wages of skilled tradespeople; and

“Whereas Ontario desperately needs a plan to solve our critical shortage of skilled tradespeople by encouraging our youth to enter the trades and attracting new tradespeople; and

“Whereas the latest policies from the McGuinty-Wynne government only aggravate the looming skilled trades shortage in Ontario;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To immediately disband the College of Trades, cease imposing needless membership fees and enact policies to attract young Ontarians into the skilled trades.”

I agree with the petition. I will be signing it and passing it off to page Jasmine.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. Todd Smith: I’m pleased to present this on behalf of some constituents in the Stirling and Belleville area in eastern Ontario.

“Whereas the 2012 Ontario budget eliminates the Community Start-Up and Maintenance Benefit and the Home Repairs Benefit; and

“Whereas these two programs have been used by thousands of Ontarians across the province as a way of lifting themselves out of poverty and achieving financial independence; and

“Whereas these two programs are in the best tradition of providing Ontarians with a hand up and not a handout when they’re in need;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario find some way to restore the Community Start-Up and Maintenance Benefit and the Home Repairs Benefit that aid the Ontarians who depend on these services without endangering the province's ability to return the budget to balance."

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

LYME DISEASE

Mr. John O'Toole: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the tick-borne illness known as chronic Lyme disease, which mimics many catastrophic illnesses such as multiple sclerosis, Crohn's, Alzheimer's, arthritic diabetes, depression, chronic fatigue and fibromyalgia, is increasingly endemic in Canada, but scientifically validated diagnostic tests and treatment choices are currently not available in Ontario, forcing patients to seek these in the USA" and/or "Europe; and

"Whereas the Canadian Medical Association informed the public, governments and the medical profession in the May 30, 2000, edition of their professional journal that Lyme disease is endemic throughout Canada, particularly in southern Ontario; and

"Whereas the Ontario public health system and the Ontario health insurance plan ... do not fund those specific tests that accurately serve the process of establishing a clinical diagnosis, but only recognize testing procedures known in the medical literature to provide false negatives 45% to 95% of the time;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to request the Minister of Health to direct that the Ontario public health system and OHIP include all currently available and scientifically verified tests for acute and chronic Lyme diagnosis, to do everything necessary to create public awareness of Lyme disease in Ontario, and to have internationally developed diagnostic and successful treatment protocols available to patients and physicians in Ontario."

1600

I'm pleased to sign and endorse this on behalf of my constituents and the people of Ontario, and present it to page Jessica.

WIND TURBINES

Ms. Laurie Scott: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Sprott Power, also known as Zero Emission People, Energy Farming Ontario Inc., and Wind Works, are proposing to construct 10 wind turbines, known as Settler's Landing and/or Snowy Ridge Wind Parks within the city of Kawartha Lakes in order to produce up to 20 megawatts of power; and

"Whereas the proposed wind parks are to be located, in whole or in part, on the Oak Ridges moraine; and

"Whereas the location of the proposed wind parks will adversely affect wildlife populations, wildlife migration patterns, human health, and the natural environment; and

"Whereas the proposed wind parks will also reduce property values and the quality of life in the surrounding communities;

"Now therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The government of Ontario live up to its throne speech commitment, and deny these applications in recognition of this not being a willing community for industrial wind turbines; and

"That the government announce an immediate moratorium on the further development of industrial wind turbines until complete studies have been completed into all direct and indirect health impacts associated with these projects."

This is one of thousands of petitions that have been brought to me by the people of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. I'll hand it over to page William and affix my signature to it.

SPRINGWATER PROVINCIAL PARK

Mr. Jim Wilson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas we oppose the making [of] Springwater Provincial Park in Springwater township, Ontario, non-operational on March 31, 2013;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"We ask that the park remain operating and facilities such as the animal sanctuary, cabins/shelters, playground equipment and ground maintenance remain open and operating."

I'm certainly pleased to sign the petition.

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Jim McDonell: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Auditor General confirmed that no comprehensive evaluation was completed by the McGuinty government on the impact of the billion-dollar commitment of renewable energy on such things as net job losses and future energy prices, which will increase another 46% over the next five years; and

"Whereas poor decisions by" this McGuinty-Wynne "government, such as the Green Energy Act, where Ontario pays up to 80 cents per kilowatt hour for electricity it doesn't need and then must pay our neighbours to take it for free, and the billion-dollar cost of the seat-saving cancellation of the Oakville and Mississauga gas power plants, have contributed to making the cost of Ontario power the highest in North America; and

"Whereas there has been no third party study to look at the health, physical, social, economic and environmental impacts of wind turbines; and

"Whereas Ontario's largest farm organizations ... have called for a suspension of industrial wind turbine development until the serious shortcomings can be addressed; and

"Whereas the" McGuinty-Wynne "government has removed all decision-making powers from the local municipal governments when it comes to the location and size of industrial wind and solar farms;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Liberal government support the MPP from Huron-Bruce Lisa Thompson's private member's motion which calls for a moratorium on all industrial wind turbine development until a third party health and environmental study has been completed."

I agree with this and will be signing it.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GREAT LAKES PROTECTION ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR LA PROTECTION DES GRANDS LACS

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 27, 2013, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 6, An Act to protect and restore the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin / Projet de loi 6, Loi visant la protection et le rétablissement du bassin des Grands Lacs et du fleuve Saint-Laurent.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate? The member for Algoma-Manitoulin.

Mr. Jonah Schein: I'm standing today to speak on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Davenport and to speak to this important issue.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Davenport.

Mr. Jonah Schein: Yeah, Davenport. Right here in Toronto.

I'm honoured to rise today to speak as the NDP's environment critic to the Great Lakes Protection Act. I hope you'll bear with me. This is the first time I've done a lead. I'll be speaking for an hour, and I know that I'll have the attention of the House here. The environment minister is here; I really appreciate that. Thank you, Minister. My colleagues will be listening as well—also, shout-outs to the two people at least watching at home, Grandma Grace and my brother, Matthew. Thanks for tuning in.

I'm really glad to see the government reintroduce this bill. They had introduced this bill before, and of course I was disappointed, as many others were, that the Liberal government decided to prorogue this Parliament, send MPPs home and wipe this bill, along with many others, off the legislative agenda. I'm glad to see it's back here now.

That was almost five months ago, Speaker, when we were not in here, we were not debating the issues that mattered, and when I had to be in my riding explaining to the members at home why we weren't doing the work that was important to them. So I know that in here time moves very slowly, and things take their time and it takes

a long time for legislation to pass. Back in Davenport, things are happening faster; things feel more urgent.

I think I'm also going to speak to the young people here today and recognize the pages in the House who spend weeks here. I know you've got your last week here before you go back to your communities. But I'm curious to know what your experience was over the last two and a half weeks here. Did this place inspire you? Do you leave here thinking we're going to get progress on environmental protection? Are we going to be able to protect the Great Lakes—I sure hope so—or is it going to be people just carrying on for long periods of time?

In Davenport, in my community just down the street from here, while this place was not moving, people continued to lose their jobs; people continued not to be able to put food on the table for their families; people continued not to have proper access to transit in our city; and the environment continued to warm over those months. So I think it's really important that we get back here and we work on these issues that are so important. We need to restore the faith in our communities that we can get things done here, and I'm pleased to be working with our leader, Andrea Horwath, and my colleagues in the NDP, to actually make this Legislature work to get results for people here. We know that we can't change everything right away, but we've put some things on the table that make a lot of sense, that are realistic and that will make an impact on people's lives.

So it's taken these last few months to get back in here and to address this issue and important issues like the Great Lakes Protection Act.

Great Lakes play a vital role in all of our lives. Millions of Ontarians live next to and depend upon the Great Lakes for drinking water, for recreation, for tourism and for jobs. Over the past 10 years, this Liberal government has not done enough to protect and sustain these ecosystems. Even this bill, as it stands now, has significant weaknesses that should be addressed. The NDP believes we can do better, that the government must do better when it comes to protecting the Great Lakes.

In my time speaking today, Speaker, I want to briefly touch on the importance of the Great Lakes to our province and the strengths of the Great Lakes Protection Act as it does stand already, and then to highlight some of the weakness in the bill and the ways that New Democrats believe it can be improved and strengthened.

Our concerns with the bill are twofold. First, New Democrats are concerned that a number of threats to the Great Lakes are left unaddressed, like threats posed to wetlands and green spaces along the basins and threats from nuclear waste. By addressing these threats, we can better protect the Great Lakes. Second, New Democrats are concerned about the bill's effectiveness. Will it be limited unless there are concrete actions and requirements set out by the Ministry of the Environment? We need action to protect the Great Lakes now. We need a commitment from this Liberal government now.

The bill outlines tools and mechanisms available to the ministry to protect the Great Lakes, but it's silent on

when this will happen and how this will happen. As the current legislation stands, there's no actual requirement or timelines for action from the ministry to set targets for the protection of the Great Lakes.

New Democrats are committed to strengthening this bill. We will support it. We will send it to committee. We will make it better. We're committed to passing a Great Lakes Protection Act that recognizes the complex challenges facing the Great Lakes and that has actual commitments to addressing these challenges.

Speaker, the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence system constitute the largest source of fresh water in the world. They support a vast diversity of species: around 4,000, species of plants, fish and wildlife in the Great Lakes area. The Great Lakes provide drinking water for 80% of Ontarians. The Great Lakes basins contain 40% of Canada's economic activity, from manufacturing to fisheries to tourism to recreation to aggregates and mining, all of which rely on clean water. Shipping on the Great Lakes contributes \$200 million every year to our provincial GDP, and the vast majority of our hydroelectric power comes from rivers feeding the Great Lakes. It's fair to say that millions of Ontarians depend upon the Great Lakes for drinking water and for employment, as well as for recreation and tourism.

1610

Speaker, as somebody who lives in Toronto—and I've worked as a social worker in this city with many folks who are low income—I know that a lot of people in my community can't actually get to a cottage in the summertime, can't get to be in nature. I find it difficult to remember that people are so far removed from a Great Lake that's just down the street from them and that we don't actually have a mechanism to connect people to the natural environment.

Interjection: Unless you're in northern Ontario.

Mr. Jonah Schein: Unless you are in northern Ontario; that's right. I'll come back to visit again soon.

I think we need to talk about an environmental strategy in this province that works for everyone. I think we need to make sure that everyone in this province can make good environmental choices. It can't just be for the 1%. I think to do that, we need to make sure that the 99% start to build a relationship with our natural environment and that government has a role to play in facilitating that relationship.

I know that there are programs that are badly underfunded at this point, programs that will take urban kids and ensure that they have access to the wilderness, have access to canoeing, to swimming. We need to make sure that we facilitate that relationship, going forward.

In our city, in Toronto, we need to make sure that people can access the Toronto ferry and are able to get to the water. But this all comes back to a political will to make sure that there is investment in public services.

I think governments have failed in this province to prioritize the important things, to prioritize food and water, and so I'm really happy to see a bill that puts

water at the forefront. It should put food at the forefront, too, when we think about our fish.

But the Great Lakes, at this point, are plagued by a number of environmental challenges, challenges that endanger the enjoyment and the benefits of Ontarians from visiting and living near the Great Lakes, and there are challenges that require dedicated funding to be effectively addressed.

Some of the challenges faced by the Great Lakes are escalating nutrient levels that result in algae buildup and beach closures. They result from pollution. Our Great Lakes face invasive species like zebra mussels and Asian carp, and of course the impacts of climate change. There is significant destruction of critical habitats, and we continue to take excessive amounts of water. These are some of the challenges facing the Great Lakes.

Speaker, for a number of years, action on Great Lakes and St. Lawrence protection has been delayed. Negotiations on the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement have been delayed, and the Canada-Ontario agreement respecting the Great Lakes ecosystem has been extended several times, rather than reviewed and renegotiated to reflect current conditions.

As Ontario's Environmental Commissioner has shown in his annual report, the Liberal government's record in protecting the Great Lakes has been spotty at best. We've seen inadequate funding for cleaning up Great Lakes. We've seen a failure to control sewage overflows. We've seen a lack of monitoring of phosphorus levels in the Great Lakes. We've seen insufficient protection of coastal wetlands from development and pollution. We've seen 70% of our coastal wetlands lost. And we've seen a failure to reduce farm and livestock nitrogen and phosphorus runoff.

There's a lack of consideration of the impact of infrastructure plans on the Great Lakes, and there's a failure to educate the public about the importance of the Great Lakes.

In addition, the government has refused to listen to the 100,000 people who are calling on them to put a stop to shipping radioactive steam generators on our Great Lakes.

The challenges facing the Great Lakes have only increased and we need a renewed political commitment to the Great Lakes now.

How are we doing, pages? Are you still with me? Are you listening?

New Democrats, our party, have been strong advocates for government action to protect the Great Lakes for a long time. In 2011, the NDP committed to implement a Great Lakes Protection Act. That act designated one minister clearly responsible for the protection of our Great Lakes and for ensuring that decisions by all ministries protect the quality and the quantity of the Great Lakes.

But we wouldn't be at the point where we are here today, at second reading of the Liberal government's version of the Great Lakes Protection Act, without the diligent effort of activists and environmental groups. So

I'd like to recognize and thank the many activists who have pressured the government on this issue. This act is the result of their efforts, and the improvements that the NDP will be pushing for are also the result of activists taking the time to speak with us to educate us on how this bill can be strengthened. So thank you, again, to all of you.

New Democrats are happy to see the Ministry of the Environment finally listening, and we are looking forward to working with this government to make this bill stronger.

I'd like to mention some things that we think are good about this bill. For one, I think we can all agree on its stated purpose. Its stated purpose is "to protect and restore the ecological health of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River basin" and "to create opportunities for individuals and communities to become involved in the protection and the restoration of the ecological health of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River basin."

It's also good to see that the bill recognizes the rights of First Nations people, who have lived around the Great Lakes for millennia and have fundamental rights to these traditional lands and waters.

The bill also refers, in its preamble, to the Great Lakes Strategy vision of Great Lakes that are drinkable, swimmable and fishable. And this is positive; it's an ambitious goal and one that we should pursue. The pressing question is whether this bill will go far enough to achieve this goal.

The bill creates a Great Lakes Guardians' Council, and the purpose of the council would be to help improve collaboration and coordination and facilitate discussion over priorities and targets. The council may include a wide range of stakeholders, including Great Lakes ministers, municipalities in the basin, First Nations and Métis communities, and representatives from environmental organizations and the scientific community. I appreciate that the council's membership does include other ministries. Securing the involvement of all ministries whose policies have impacts on the Great Lakes is a good idea. But there are no actual requirements for ministers to align their policies and programs with the Great Lakes Strategy.

We only need to look at what happened when the Liberal government introduced and passed their omnibus bill, Bill 55, last spring to see what types of changes other legislation can have on our environment. Bill 55, the budget bill, included changes to nine environmental laws, including the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, the Lakes and Rivers Improvement Act, and the Public Lands Act, circumventing the requirement for public consultation. We need to be sure that actions taken under the Great Lakes Protection Act are not going to be undermined by other legislation.

Also, the section of the Great Lakes Protection Act dealing with the guardian council is worded in such a way that council membership is entirely up to the discretion of the Ministry of the Environment. There is no core group within the council and no actual requirement

for certain groups to be consulted. Who will determine whether a person or an organization's representative should or should not be on the council? How big is this council? When is the first meeting of this council? How often will this council meet? So it seems to be that it's up to the Minister of the Environment to determine who is consulted and when.

It would make sense to me for the Great Lakes Guardians' Council to have a core group of stakeholders, and that membership and meetings are open and transparent so that all Ontarians can have a say in decisions that matter to them.

1620

Another element of the act is its encouragement of geographically focused initiatives. These initiatives are supposedly intended to enable local communities to address local issues of concern. They can be developed by the province or another public body, like a municipality or conservation authority, to address a priority issue. Priority issues can include things like excessive algae, the protection of habitats or coordinated efforts to improve beaches.

This all sounds great in theory—local input is absolutely important—but there's a significant amount of vagueness surrounding the geographically focused initiatives. For one, this act doesn't say how long it will take for these initiatives to be developed. What is the expected timeline for an initiative to get approved? How many initiatives will be developed? How will these initiatives be funded? Who will determine how and which of these initiatives will be funded? There need to be legally enforceable policies associated with these initiatives to ensure that real actions take place.

Based on the briefing that I received from the Ministry of the Environment, I also understand that these initiatives require government approval at the proposal stage and at finalization. Here, "government approval" means cabinet approval. I'm worried that, without legally enforceable policies, these geographically focused initiatives sound like a way for the government to say that it is empowering local communities while putting the protection of the Great Lakes on the back burner and failing to show leadership itself and deliver initiatives that work, and that it could be a way for the Liberal government to sidestep the hard work of putting together initiatives in the best interest of our environment and use the approval process to have final say on what can and cannot be done.

There's a difference between local empowerment and downloading. I want to make sure that we are doing the former and not the latter. Again, this approval process concerns me because cabinet has the final say, and as such, it's open to political interference. Unfortunately, Speaker, we have seen all too much political interference when it comes to the public good in the province of Ontario.

While these geographically focused initiatives sound good, this Liberal government needs to show real commitment to grassroots and local empowerment. I would

like to see targets, and I would like to see commitments around the following: How many initiatives does the government intend to set up? By when does the government want to have these in place? What areas or issues will the government prioritize for these initiatives? We want to see accountability so the approval process from start to finish is very clear to all interested parties and Ontarians.

Speaker, by now it should be clear that there are clearly some good elements to this bill, and we should be building on them to strengthen the bill and protect the Great Lakes. I think that by working together, we can make this better. New Democrats' concerns around these elements like the guardians' council and the geographically focused initiatives are based on concerns over accountability and transparency, a lack of targets and a lack of commitments to concrete action.

Again, the Great Lakes Protection Act sounds great. It feels great to say, "Yes, we want to support and protect the Great Lakes." Everyone does. But at the end of the day, we also need action.

We all know that the Great Lakes are under immense distress. So where is the leadership? Speaker, it takes real leadership to look at all the options and say, "This is what we will commit to"; This is what we will do"; "This is our plan for action"; "These are the real results we'll get for Ontarians." Andrea Horwath has shown this leadership, and maybe the Liberal government can take this time to learn from her and her reasonable proposals.

At this point we are back here in the Legislature trying to make sure this place works a little bit better. We are approaching a budget, and I hope the government has heard clearly about the priorities that we've heard, as New Democrats, from the people in our constituencies. We have laid out a few of these, and we expect the government will listen to these priorities as we move through the budget process.

The first one of these priorities is about social assistance. It's about supporting people who are without full-time paid work, who are dependent on social assistance, but up until now, their income has been clawed back and taken away. Not only is it an disincentive from finding and keeping work; it's also putting people further in poverty, and it often prevents them from paying the bills.

One of the things we have put on the table—and I think it's long overdue; it's very reasonable—is to make sure that there are no clawbacks on income for the first \$200 that somebody on social assistance in Ontario gets, going forward. We've heard support from the Conservatives on this. I'd like to see support from the government on this. It's a very small piece of the social assistance reform package that the Lankin commission put out, but it is an important piece, and it would put up to \$200 more into the pockets of low-income people. I hope the government is listening to this and that they know how serious and committed we are to making sure that this province is fairer and that they've put this initiative forward in the budget process.

Another very key piece for me is around how we share our resources. We've put forward an idea that will actual-

ly bring in resources, bring in revenue, and make sure that we can pay for the things that we care about, like protecting the Great Lakes.

I hope that the government hears our seriousness when we talk about closing corporate tax loopholes. We know that we would save over \$1 billion in the next several years if we closed some of the gigantic loopholes that this government has created. Those billions of dollars can go to our public services, to our health care, to creating jobs and to protecting our environment.

Speaker, I think I might have strayed off there for a second, so I'd like to come back here and say the Great Lakes Protection Act states the Minister of the Environment "may" set both qualitative and quantitative targets. This allows the minister to set measurable targets, and that's good. But the Great Lakes Protection Act should require the minister to set targets, both qualitative and quantitative, and it should require a timeline for when these targets should be announced and completed.

When I was at the ministerial briefing on this, the Ministry of the Environment representative spoke about how these targets take time to produce. They rely on a science-based approach, and they require a lot of research. No one is disputing that we need a science-based approach, and science-based targets are what the NDP wants to see as well. We want to see a solid step towards a government commitment within this act, a commitment with targets and priorities as identified in the Great Lakes Strategy.

In the strategy, the government identified six priority areas: engaging and empowering communities; protecting water for humans and ecological health; improving wetlands, beaches and coastal areas; protecting habitats and species; enhancing understanding and adaptation; and ensuring sustainable economic opportunities. The strategy then identifies key actions that could be achieved in each of these priority areas.

What we're looking for from this government is leadership to identify targets and timelines based on these priority areas and actions which have already been identified. We aren't asking this government to reinvent the wheel; we just need to build on what has been done. We're asking for a commitment. We're asking for legislation with some teeth.

In addition to these priority area targets, the government can also easily set targets for geographically focused initiatives and set timelines for when the guardians' council should meet. Targets and timelines are important. Setting targets will direct and encourage action. Targets are also yardsticks, and we can measure our progress against them.

1630

When the Great Lakes Protection Act was first introduced, I received over 1,000 emails from Ontarians across this province. The message to me was clear—

Mr. John Vanthof: A thousand?

Mr. Jonah Schein: A thousand. They wanted concrete action, John.

Mr. John Vanthof: Your people are engaged.

Mr. Jonah Schein: That's right. They wanted timelines and they wanted targets for protection of the Great Lakes.

The Great Lakes Protection Act Alliance, made up of the Canadian Environmental Law Association, Ecojustice, Ducks Unlimited, Environmental Defence, Great Lakes United and the Sierra Club, stated that, "Targets must be set and progress towards achieving them must be reported on. Without targets it may be difficult to do what is necessary to save the Great Lakes."

Not only are qualitative and quantitative targets needed for protection of the Great Lakes, but commitments should also be made to report periodically and to provide interim progress on these targets as well.

The minister's statement on the bill indicated that the minister has heard environmental groups' and Ontarians' concerns about the importance of targets. But to date, the government has not made this a requirement of the bill. If we are going to be serious about addressing the challenges faced in the Great Lakes, we need that commitment from the Liberal government. We need to see this government put timelines and targets in this bill and to show some real leadership on the Great Lakes.

The Environmental Commissioner should be able to report on protection efforts in his reports. It's only targets and timelines that will allow the commissioner to hold this government to account. We need regulations associated with the act, and we need these to be posted on the Environmental Bill of Rights. The purposes of the act should be incorporated into ministerial statements of environmental values to guide provincial decision-making.

The time for action on behalf of the Great Lakes is now. New Democrats have added their voices to the voices of the environmental groups across the province and everyday Ontarians who want to see timelines and targets, and they want to see accountability in this bill. We will continue to push for these to be included.

Let's talk about the other areas of the Great Lakes Protection Act that need clarification and strengthening. We need to ensure that the act addresses the entire Great Lakes basin, including the areas that feed the Great Lakes. When we were consulting with folks about the Great Lakes, some groups expressed uncertainty about whether the bill applies to the entire basin, and whether geographically focused initiatives can only be carried out in areas where there are municipalities or conservation authorities.

It's important that all wetlands—that forests and green spaces in the entire Great Lakes basin—should be addressed by the act. Wetlands help filter and recharge fresh water, and they influence the quality of drinking water. Wetlands prevent flooding, droughts and erosion. They provide important habitats and help mitigate climate change impacts by storing greenhouse gases. Our wetlands have 600 species living in them. Speaker, the value of environmental services provided by the wetlands' ecosystems in Canada—for example, providing drinking water and habitat for fish and wildlife—is estimated at \$20 billion annually.

I think this calls attention to the important difference in the way we can do our accounting. There's the money that we do spend to try to protect our fisheries, to try to protect our water, and then there are the natural benefits of having an environment. I think too often the numbers that get thrown around in this building don't take into account the benefits of the natural environment and the economic benefits of the natural environment, but also just the plain old benefits of being able to go for a swim or having glass of water that you can drink.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: Or fishing.

Mr. Jonah Schein: Or fishing. Food, right? Food and water.

The truth is that wetlands in Ontario are threatened by development and are threatened by invasive species and they're threatened by pollution. Speaker, 80% of fish need wetlands, but 70% of coastal wetlands have been lost due to development and pollution. I've seen this first-hand. I've recently been to Second Marsh in Oshawa; I've had the chance to see the marsh there. I've walked out on the observation area. I've seen the incredible diversity of the land there and the species there, and even though I visited on a cold November morning, there were people walking about, using these trails, experiencing nature as part of their daily lives. Not only is it amazing, but Oshawa as a municipality has done a lot over the past two decades to restore the marsh and the surrounding areas, and to restore its waterfront to a healthy environment that can be enjoyed.

Currently, this project is threatened by the port authority's plan to set up an ethanol plant, even though the ethanol plant is opposed by citizens and hundreds of people; it's opposed by the municipality. Its provincial and federal representatives, however, have been silent on this issue. I've written to the ministry about this issue, but so far the ministry has not responded and hasn't shown any leadership on this issue. That's a shame.

These wetlands are crucial, and they are a threatened part of our ecosystem. Waterfronts on the Great Lakes should be protected. The Great Lakes are for everyone. They're not just for the profit of a few, and we need to make sure that we have government that protects everyone. I'm hopeful that strengthening the Great Lakes Protection Act can result in new tools, and mandates available public bodies to properly defend these precious parts of our environment. The New Democrats will work to see that the entirety of the Great Lakes basin—the lands, the green spaces and the wetlands surrounding the lakes and the rivers that feed them—is properly protected.

Conservation groups have also expressed a concern as to whether this bill will actually strengthen controls on pollution and discharges into the Great Lakes. Surprisingly, the bill currently fails to state as an explicit purpose the reduction and elimination of toxic substances into the Great Lakes. Tough new restrictions are needed on chemical, toxic and sewage pollution, with serious enforcement standards and mechanisms, as well as strict new regulations on industrial food production to curb

chemical runoff, including the input streams feeding the lakes.

There has to be a change. The polluter must pay. Ontarians shouldn't have to pay for the cleanup of big companies' pollution with their health or with their tax dollars because the Liberal government won't properly enforce regulations on corporations.

There is also a concern about whether the bill will adequately deal with the upgrading of sewage- and stormwater-management systems. There is clearly a need to invest in our aging sewage infrastructure, something that many cash-strapped municipalities are simply not able to afford. It's nice to put this bill out there, to say these nice things, but without actual resources in place to make sure that communities can make good environmental choices, we're simply not going to see the change that we need to see.

We need to pay more attention, I think, to cost-effective, environmentally friendly approaches such as water efficiency programs and soft-path green infrastructure approaches to reduce sewage flow. These are things like green roofs, porous asphalt, stormwater detention ponds and constructed wetlands. Even in the city of Toronto here, right over at the University of Toronto, in preparation for the Pan American Games, the government has made a deal with the university to put Astroturf on the soccer pitch over there. This is exactly the wrong direction to take. There is no opportunity to reduce the groundwater that's going to go right into our Great Lakes. We can see that if you just step out the door here at Queen's Park.

These are all initiatives to keep stormwater out of sewers and to use natural systems to remove pollutants, which leads to a higher quality of stormwater ultimately being released and less damage to our environment.

There are other imminent threats that can also be addressed by the Great Lakes Protection Act. The act can easily lead to a change in Ontario government policy to continue to allow Ontario's nuclear power stations to use outdated once-through cooling systems. These systems—the current systems that we have in place—allow plants to suck in and spew out hundreds of millions of litres of water a day, killing hundreds of millions of fish each year. This is something that could be easily remedied. It could be remedied by requiring a closed-cycle cooling water technology for industrial facilities operating on the Great Lakes. These are systems that are used cost-effectively in the United States.

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It's also not clear whether the bill will change the government's policy to allow Bruce Power to ship radioactive steam generators from its nuclear stations across the Great Lakes, which is a plan that's been opposed by First Nations leaders and hundreds of thousands of Ontarians.

Finally, Speaker, it's unclear whether the bill will ensure that the provincial government requires a full environmental assessment before allowing the shipment of tar sands bitumen across the Great Lakes. This is a

plan that puts the Great Lakes at risk of a spill, like the one that happened in Michigan in 2010, which cost over \$1 billion to clean up. Speaker, we can't afford these potential costs to our environment or to our provincial budget.

I know that my colleague the NDP energy critic has written to the Ministry of the Environment about these very issues to make sure that we have an environmental assessment before this project goes forward.

Speaker, these are all real threats to the Great Lakes and the millions of Ontarians who depend on these lakes. They are real reminders of the dangers and the environmental costs of relying on nuclear power too, and further investing in nuclear power.

As New Democrats, we believe we should be focusing on energy conservation first and foremost, that we should move towards renewable energy, and yet we have a Liberal government and an official opposition who continue to move forward with expensive and environmentally costly nuclear power. New Democrats have been long advocating that government prioritize conservation over these expensive plans to expand our reliance on nuclear power.

Speaker, what about the issues of beach water quality? Let's not forget that we are working for Great Lakes that are drinkable and swimmable and fishable. There is a need for improved monitoring of beach water quality and restoration and improvement of beaches with chronic water quality problems. Right now there are beaches in Ontario that are not tested for water quality, there are different frequencies for testing, and it's not easy for the public to access these tests. Speaker, if you go down to swim in Lake Ontario after a rainy day, it's probably polluted because of all the runoff, but the testing cycle doesn't actually allow you to get those results in time. By the time those results do come in, it might be safe to swim again. We need to change this.

Lake Ontario Waterkeeper has called for action to expand the number of beaches that are tested, to move to real-time posting of testing results to improve public access to water quality levels. They've also called for a beach remediation fund to help deal with problem beaches, and they're calling for a clear public target, such as ensuring that the Great Lakes beaches meet the Ontario provincial water quality objective by a given year, let's say 2020. Again, Speaker, targets are feasible and they are necessary for the Great Lakes Protection Act to actually fulfill its vision.

Ontario also needs a comprehensive coastal protection strategy. This strategy should include a range of measures such as watershed planning in prioritized areas, and education and incentives for private landowners to engage in coastal protection and land protection in priority areas. There should be a strengthening of the provincial policy statement to ensure protection for coastal wetlands and stronger regulation of phosphorus and other emissions. There should be improved stormwater techniques, and the promotion of shoreline conservation through the official plans.

Speaker, there is also a need to expand source water protection in northern Ontario, as recommended in the Walkerton inquiry. We need to see real plans for action from this government. In fact, the Great Lakes Strategy includes performance indicators for priority areas that could be built upon and made into concrete targets and timelines.

At the moment, the Great Lakes Protection Act does not actually require the minister to see the Great Lakes Strategy through. The act does not require the Ministry of the Environment to actually implement the strategy. It requires the minister to review and maintain the strategy, but that is quite different. Again, there's no requirement for action; there's no commitment. I'd like to see greater leadership from across this floor.

So why is there a lack of targets and timelines? I think it's related to my next point. There are minimal commitments to funding any part of the Great Lakes Protection Act or Strategy. In fact, the only funding I've seen is that committed to the guardian council, and that is a shame, Speaker. Already, we see ministries that are unable to do their job. There is simply no way they can protect our lakes. There's no way they can protect from invasive species without proper funding, and the costs and the damage that will happen to our Great Lakes if we allow these invasive species to get in are unimaginable. And yet this government won't actually put any resource, won't dedicate any funding to its protection, and this is a shame.

According to the Environmental Commissioner—again, for those of you watching at home, the Environmental Commissioner is a really important piece of how this Legislature works. It's an independent voice that provides regular updates about how we're doing as a province on environmental protection. The Environmental Commissioner has reported that "chronic under-funding has been a key weakness of the Canada-Ontario Agreement Respecting the Great Lakes Basin Ecosystem." It's only a fraction of the cost of cleaning up areas of concern or upgrading sewage treatment facilities, and none of this has been allocated.

The reality is that this government needs to commit adequate funding to develop and support Great Lakes protections and initiatives. This Liberal government has let the Great Lakes be exploited for private profit and has ignored many of its existing commitments to protect the Great Lakes. And now, the government wants to introduce a bill with almost no funding commitments, maybe because it's wary of the costs of cleaning up their previous errors.

It reminds me about how this government insists on cutting taxes for big corporations. It racks up billions in debt and it tells the rest of Ontario that it's time for austerity. It cuts back services and tries to impose wage freezes. If we had not moved ahead with this agenda of tax cuts, we'd have the budget balanced right now and we could be investing in environmental protection.

Interjection: It's true.

Mr. Jonah Schein: It's true, Speaker. We've lost about \$15 billion a year since the time that former Pre-

mier Harris, Premier McGuinty and now our new Premier have been here. It's about \$15 billion annually that has been lost to corporate tax cuts.

This isn't fair. It's not in the interest of Ontarians. Again, this government needs to commit adequate funding to develop and support Great Lakes protection programs and initiatives.

The government failed to allocate any funding to the Great Lakes in the act or the 2012 budget bill, Bill 55. The Liberal government must follow through on its campaign promise, a promise that did contribute to their election to a minority government. During that campaign, the Liberal government promised \$52 million to protect the Great Lakes and committed to allocating any additional funding needed to adequately implement regulations, initiatives and targets stemming from the act and the strategy. Speaker, you make a promise; you get elected on that promise. I believe you should keep that promise.

This government doesn't commit to the money. I'm worried that this act will become like other acts and agreements signed before it. It's a nice idea, but it's an idea that eventually gets forgotten or is implemented at the discretion of the government, and who knows when that might happen or how long this party might be the government? Far too much work has gone into this act and this strategy to have it fall by the wayside.

There needs to be a shift in how the Great Lakes are viewed, I believe. The Great Lakes are a shared public good. We need to stop seeing this invaluable part of our province as primarily a resource for private profit. Groups like the Council of Canadians have made clear that the root cause of degradation of the Great Lakes is the traditional view of the lakes solely as a source for private profit or for personal benefit. But we need to shift our thinking to see it as a shared public resource, a commons to be shared and protected and managed by those living around the lakes.

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Communities must have the right to say no to projects that destroy, divert or withdraw vast amounts of water from the Great Lakes. This vision is already reflected in community efforts across Ontario to pass resolutions to ban the sale of bottled water in municipally owned facilities and at municipal events, and to reject the public-private partnership for water and sanitation services.

Speaker, I know that if the official opposition were listening, they would be very angry, because they want private citizens always to have the right to buy plastic and put their water in it and to drink that, at any cost to the environment. But they're not listening, and that's okay.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I was listening.

Mr. Jonah Schein: All right.

Mr. Randy Hillier: But I still don't agree with you.

Mr. Jonah Schein: Speaker, New Democrats also proposed legislation to ban bottled-water sales in provincial government facilities, and we join Ontario's Environment Commissioner in calling for a significant

increase to fees for water withdrawals. It's embarrassing that large companies in Ontario currently pay less than \$4 for withdrawing a million litres of water. It's good business if you can get it. This isn't sustainable, and it's not in our province's best interest.

In 2010, 122 countries voted to pass a resolution at the United Nations General Assembly recognizing the human right to water and to sanitation. The Ontario NDP has promoted this vision by urging the Liberal government to reference the right to water in the Water Opportunities Act, passed in 2010.

As we know, the Great Lakes are not just about water. They're about fish and they're about food. Just yesterday, the United Nations put out a report on our failings as a country to ensure the right to food.

Speaker, I was in my own community yesterday to hear the United Nations report. They did it on the Internet. It was pumped in onscreen, and it was actually to a room of about 150 people who use a local meal program. Those people didn't know that there's actually no enforcement of any right to food in Canada. These are people and families who, every week, struggle to just make sure that there is food in their households. I think it's time we put food and water first in this province, and so far, this government has refused.

The Liberal government now has the opportunity to recognize the human right to water and sanitation in the Great Lakes Protection Act. This recognition would require the government to uphold its obligations to respect, protect and fulfill this right.

"The obligation to respect" means that the Ontario government must refrain from any action or policy that interferes with the enjoyment of this right, including denying essential water services because of an inability to pay.

Under the obligation to protect, the government is obliged to prevent third parties from interfering with the enjoyment of this right—for example, by protecting local communities from pollution caused by hydraulic fracking, and from inequitable extraction of water by corporations or governments.

Under the obligation to fulfill, the Ontario government is required to adopt any additional measures directed towards the realization of this right, such as investing in public water and waste water services.

As the NDP critic for the environment, I have to say that access to water, and the right to water, is one of the central issues in our province. People are concerned about their water. They want to protect it. They feel that corporations have an extreme advantage, that corporations often get the go-ahead to build quarries and landfills below the water table and to develop these close to rivers, all to the endangerment of people's drinking water.

We saw this recently play out in Melancthon. We saw international companies go ahead and try to create a mega quarry in Melancthon, to take agricultural land that had been in production for hundreds of years, and to take rock out of the ground instead of food. In that process, they would have displaced over 600 million litres of water per day.

Speaker, I would say that this is one of the few good news stories in the last year in this province. While legislators were locked out of this building, residents in Melancthon and activists across this province were organized. They came together and beat the company there and ensured that they withdrew their application to have a mega quarry.

I do have concerns that that mega quarry company is just waiting for a Conservative government in Ontario to give them the go-ahead to reverse this decision. This is something we need to worry about. I'd like to hear a commitment from the Conservative government to protect agricultural lands in Ontario, to prevent that from becoming a mega quarry.

That kind of imbalance, when it comes to corporations versus the community, is the kind of imbalance that we've seen too often in this province, and we've seen the impacts on our access to food and water in Ontario.

Speaker, I saw this inequity when I was in Brantford recently. Brantford decided to rezone areas along the Grand River in order to protect the natural heritage features and attributes of the land. Actually, in Brantford, there's documentation of human settlement from over 1,100 years ago. It has been identified as a source protection area and an intake protection zone. However, developers have proposed to set up residential units in this area, which would not only disrupt the groundwater flow but also risk contamination entering the local water source. In response to the city's decision to rezone the area, these developers have taken the city of Brantford to the Ontario Municipal Board, and now they're having their rights trampled. We know that the OMB is unaccountable and it doesn't side with the environmental concerns of citizens.

So it begs the question: What about the autonomy of local communities to protect their food and water?

That is why the government should recognize the rights of Ontarians to water. The government should also consider a process for citizens and communities living on the basin to sue corporations and governments that are knowingly polluting their local water sources, for violation of their human right to clean water, and a declaration that water and waste water services are public services to be equitably and affordably provided by government.

Viewing the Great Lakes as a commons to be shared amongst the people and access to water as a right should guide the Great Lakes Protection Act in the right direction.

Speaker, I look forward to this government's consideration of our party's proposals.

New Democrats have concerns that this bill sets up a mechanism to develop initiatives but it doesn't actually create initiatives itself. It enables change, but it doesn't lead the way on change. New Democrats are concerned that this bill sets up a mechanism for a discussion of priorities and collaboration but it doesn't actually set targets or timelines or require ministerial collaboration or action.

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: That's right; it looks like it's doing something, as opposed to doing something.

Mr. Jonah Schein: It looks like it's doing something.

Speaker, the bill is welcome and we're happy to see the government introduce it, but the fact is, we've heard a lot of conversation, but we need to see action when it comes to Great Lakes protection. It's important that we create a legislative framework that enables action to protect the Great Lakes.

The threats to the Great Lakes are immediate; they are pressing. I would argue that they're more pressing, more important than the partisan or political interests of any one party here in this Legislature.

In his 2010-11 annual report, the Environmental Commissioner outlined a range of actions that Ontario needed to take then—and to take now. He said to:

- adopt integrated watershed planning, as developed for Lake Simcoe, to all Great Lakes;

- ensure that all municipalities have plans in place to deal with sewage overflows;

- reinstate the practice of reporting data on phosphorus and other pollutant levels for municipal waste water plants;

- include policies within local source protection plans so that they can require amendments to official plans and zoning bylaws in order to protect the Great Lakes as a source of drinking water;

- build on the successful cosmetic pesticides act, to reduce harmful effluents into the Great Lakes from industry and agriculture;

- update the 1992 Environmental Farm Plan to reduce agricultural runoff of phosphorus and nitrogen and other effluents; and

- strengthen the 2002 Nutrient Management Act to ensure better control of manure runoff from livestock operations.

1700

Speaker, the Environmental Commissioner was clear that these things simply have not happened. But the good news is that ideas for immediate action are already out there. The Environmental Commissioner has put some of these forward, and New Democrats have put our ideas forward, and environmental stakeholders have spent 10 years proposing targets and timelines for this Liberal government, and the Liberal government has itself included actions within the strategy.

Now what we need to see are commitments within the act. There are concrete actions that the government can commit to now to get work on the Great Lakes started, and New Democrats would like to see these commitments reflected in a strengthened Great Lakes Protection Act. The NDP will be pushing to see clear targets and timelines included in the act, greater clarity on the guardians' council, and geographically focused initiatives. And we'd like to see that threats like pollution, like nuclear waste and like the erosion of wetlands and green space within the basin are not overlooked but that these are properly addressed in the act.

Speaker, we look forward to the government making good on its election promise from 2011 and providing the financial commitments to seeing the Great Lakes protected, and we look forward to working with this government to make this act as strong as possible.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Comments? Questions?

Mr. Phil McNeely: It's a pleasure for me to rise today to respond to the member for Davenport, who speaks with, you can tell, a lot of emotion towards the environment and a lot of concern towards the environment. That's great to see, and I only expect that from that member.

One of the issues that I was interested in as the new PA for the environment, looking at the documentation, is that climate change is a real concern for the Great Lakes. In many ways, climate change connects to the water levels of the Great Lakes, which we've heard from many up in, especially, Georgian Bay.

I sat with somebody the other day in Ottawa and they were talking about the great water changes, that their docks are no longer reaching the shoreline—and that climate change is very easy to see why. There's less ice cover and there's more absorption of energy by the water. As the water gets warmer, there's more evaporation, and that's something that's going to continue. You'll have less ice cover every winter. The same thoughts go into what's happening in the Arctic. We're just seeing it within our waters here.

Wetlands is something that I was involved in for many years, so I'm glad to see that that was one of your comments. Some of the projects that will come out of the Great Lakes Guardians' Council will be wetlands, and increasing wetlands, which are so important to take all those toxic chemicals out of the water before they enter the Great Lakes.

I could stand up here and speak for probably several minutes on what you said. I'm glad about the issues that you've brought up. They're the important issues.

We look forward to getting this through the committee stage.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Questions and comments?

Mr. Randy Hillier: I'd like to just refer to the member from Davenport's comments about doing things in an evidence-based fashion and whatnot, along with many other things in that 60-minute speech.

I've got a study here from Environment Canada that looks at 14 very significant categories and criteria in the Great Lakes from 1987 up until 2012. These 14 categories cover everything from eutrophication to loss of fish and wildlife, closure of beaches—a number of different things. It's interesting, when you look through that evidence, whether we take Thunder Bay—in 1987 in Thunder Bay, there were 10 of those 14 criteria we were concerned about. They were below levels; that's now down to five. There's been a significant improvement in Thunder Bay. When you look at Severn harbour, in 1987 there were six areas of concern; it is now zero. It is

excellent. You keep going through—same with Wheatley Harbour on Lake Erie, and even the St. Lawrence River, the outlet: 11 areas of concern in 1987, down to 3 in 2012.

It's interesting. We should actually talk about how good our environment has been doing. We have been making tremendous strides in our environment. I know we hear a lot of doom and gloom and that we must be protected by the Minister of the Environment's new guardian council—his guardian angels over there—even though we have no idea what they're actually going to do other than cost us money, but I'm going to bring this over to the Minister of the Environment so that he can have some evidence, and to the—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Further comments and questions? The member for—

Mr. John Vanthof: Timiskaming—Cochrane.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Timiskaming—Cochrane. Sorry.

Mr. John Vanthof: It's an honour for me to once again be able to rise in this House and comment on the comments of my colleague the member from Davenport, across the way from Ottawa—Orléans and the last speaker from Lennox—Frontenac—

Mr. Randy Hillier: Lanark.

Mr. John Vanthof: —Lanark and Addington. I wrote it down wrong; I'm sorry.

We've been given an incredible resource in this province and this country with the Great Lakes—the Great Lakes basin, in our province—and a lot of times we might not appreciate it, because a lot of us are far away from it. My constituents in Timiskaming would be surprised to learn that they are covered by this—a lot of them would be—because they are, because a big part of my riding is in the Great Lakes basin.

I think we all have to work hard to protect the resources that we've been given and make sure that those resources are still there for oncoming generations, but it takes more to protect resources than just creating more enabling legislation. Once again, it's a good thing that we're here discussing enabling legislation, but there are concerns out in the country that in a case like MNR, they don't have the resources right now to enforce the legislation that's out there. Once again, we should have the best legislation that we have, and if this legislation is going to make issues like that better—

Mr. Randy Hillier: You can take the ones from my area.

Mr. John Vanthof: No, but there are cases where we have things going wrong just because we can't enforce the legislation we have now. Sometimes to solve those problems, we make the legislation stronger, but we don't actually look if the legislation we have now is working. While we look at new legislation, we should also work together to make sure that the legislation we have now is working to its full capacity. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The Minister of the Environment.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I want to commend the member, first of all, on having a very constructive and positive approach to this piece of legislation. I know there's a temptation in legislative bodies across the country—and, indeed, internationally—for people who sit in the so-called opposition benches to automatically oppose anything that a government brings forward. I thought the member analyzed the bill extremely well, identified where he thought there were strengths in the bill and indicated where he would like to see changes made. That's precisely the approach that we should have in this regard.

I wish I could have heard the same the other day from my good friend, the critic for the Conservative Party. As I mentioned on that occasion, the hardest job in this world, or at least in this Legislature, has to be environment critic for the Conservative Party, because you're not allowed to defend the environment. He's a great guy—

Interjections.

Hon. James J. Bradley: No, please; he's a great guy. I think he, in his heart of hearts, probably has a lot of affinity for this bill, but the people in the Conservative caucus bureau write these speeches that members are forced to read. I know that my friend Mr. Hillier does not read those speeches the way he is told to.

I want to indicate—the member may not have been aware of the fact that the government has dedicated, very recently, \$46 million to the cleanup of Hamilton harbour—a tremendous amount of money—matched by the federal government and by the people locally, so that will make a huge difference, and we have committed some 52 million additional dollars. He would know as well that the government has allocated and already invested three quarters of a billion dollars on the upgrade of water treatment, particularly waste water treatment plants, along the Great Lakes. So I'm looking forward to his continued advice and suggestions as we proceed through the readings of this bill.

1710

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Davenport has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Jonah Schein: Speaker, it's pretty much every day that I pinch myself with the reality that I was elected to be a member of provincial Parliament and to come into this building.

A lot of things don't work in this province, a lot of things don't work in this Legislature, but you know, a lot of the debate that happens here seems very insignificant and yet the legislation that comes out of here is incredibly important.

I want to appreciate all the members in this room, but specifically the Minister of the Environment and the member from Ottawa—Orléans—I know that your heart is in this, and it gives me more hope knowing that your heart is in this. But it's going to take more than hope. Climate change denial simply is not going to protect us. We do need science. The progress that we've made in this province has been through collective action. It's been when we've had government take a strong lead on this.

I appreciate that some new resources have gone in, and yet I'm concerned that the priorities of the province, the political priorities in this building, have been too far on the side of private interests and not as much on the side of the public good. Speaker, we do need to make sure that this is a properly resourced initiative, and that we make food and water a priority in this province.

I appreciate being in a caucus with members from all over Ontario. It also gives me a great sense of confidence to hear from the member from Timiskaming—Cochrane, who grew up in northern Ontario, who lives in northern Ontario, who lives close to a lake and has a real relationship to the natural environment.

I think that we'll have to make legislation that works at all levels, that actually sets out a good framework, but that actually really works for communities in Ontario. That is the way; that is the key to success.

Speaker, thank you very much, and we'll continue debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I'm very pleased to rise to speak about the reintroduction of the Great Lakes Protection Act.

If I may, Speaker, I'm going to recap a bit about that first, and then I'd like to talk about what this means in my riding of Pickering—Scarborough East, because waterways, including Lake Ontario and the Rouge River, which runs through my riding and feeds into Lake Ontario, as well as Highland Creek, are boundaries of my riding, actually. I don't think it's too common that we have many ridings that are surrounded by water, and that those water boundaries are indeed the riding boundaries. I will talk a little bit about Frenchman's Bay as well, which is a very important watershed in our Great Lakes system, and how this is very near and dear to the residents in my riding, because this is what I devoted my maiden resolution speech to. There have been great developments on that since I did that speech back in November 2011.

Just first, I guess, to recap on what we're doing here with the Great Lakes Protection Act: On February 25 of this month, the act was reintroduced for first reading. The proposed legislation is indeed enabling and includes flexible tools to work with local organizations, build on existing programs and other groups for targeted action. The proposed act was an election commitment of the Liberal government in 2011. It was part of the recent throne speech and Premier Wynne's commitment to Ontarians. It was first introduced in June 2012, and it was affected by prorogation. So here we are now, reintroducing it.

However, things happened during prorogation; things continued to move.

Going back to the summer, the public was invited to comment on the proposed act through the Environmental Bill of Rights, and the meetings with stakeholders were held. I know others were busy working on preparing to reintroduce this, during prorogation and since it ended.

Why do we need the Great Lakes Protection Act, Speaker? I think we all know that the Great Lakes are vitally important to the people of Ontario for drinking water, quality of life and prosperity. We need to restore them now, to continue to enjoy their benefits for this and future generations. As you know, Speaker, so much of the work we do in this Legislature is not about today; it is about the future. This piece of legislation is no exception to that.

New challenges are overwhelming old solutions when it comes to our Great Lakes in Ontario. That's why we need new initiatives to help the Great Lakes. The proposed Great Lakes Protection Act is designed to give the province new tools to restore and protect our Great Lakes so they're drinkable, swimmable and fishable.

The Great Lakes provide more than 80% of our drinking water and are important to the people of Ontario for economic prosperity. Over 95% of Ontario's agricultural land is in the Great Lakes basin. Scientists tell us that three of our four Great Lakes are in decline, and they are Lake Ontario, Lake Erie and Lake Huron.

While developing this legislation, we've listened to the people of Ontario, and they were clear about the importance of this legislation to protect the Great Lakes. We will consider amendments during the legislative period to reflect the feedback we received following the introduction of the bill last year. We'll continue to listen to First Nations and Métis communities, Great Lakes experts, municipal leaders, interested stakeholders and the people of Ontario as the legislation proceeds through the House.

I guess the big question is, what exactly would this piece of legislation do? If passed, it would help restore and protect the Great Lakes, as I mentioned before, so they are drinkable, fishable and swimmable.

The purpose of the proposed act is twofold: (1) to protect and restore the ecological health of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River basin; and (2) to create opportunities for individuals and communities to become involved in the protection and the restoration of the ecological health of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River basin.

The proposed act would create a Great Lakes Guardians' Council, which would provide a collaborative forum among Great Lakes ministers and others, including aboriginal, business, agricultural, environmental and municipal reps, to talk about priorities, potential financial measures and partnerships for projects, and sharing information.

The act would require the minister to maintain the Ontario Great Lakes Strategy, the first Ontario roadmap ever, which lays out provincial priorities for Great Lakes protection.

It would also enable the minister to set Great Lakes science-based targets, and, finally, following consultations with local groups, enable the establishment of a geologically focused initiative to take focused action in priority coastal, watershed and other ecologically significant areas.

What gaps does this proposed act fill? We're very fortunate in Ontario to have leading legislation that covers specific areas such as drinking water testing, for example. However, we don't have a comprehensive suite of tools to address the combined stresses on the Great Lakes at a regional level. In the sessions that have been conducted by the ministry, we heard the need for more comprehensive approaches. The act will allow for local groups, the province and others to work towards comprehensive solutions for a specific area.

We also heard the need to bring players together for coordinated and focused action, and so the act creates the Great Lakes Guardians' Council. We also heard the need for clear, science-based targets, so the act will allow for the developments of these targets.

When I think about the Great Lakes, as I said at the beginning of my comments here this afternoon, I immediately think of my maiden resolution in this Legislature in December 2011. My resolution asked the government to consider joining two other levels of government—the federal government and the municipal government in the region of Durham—to support the rehabilitation of the Frenchman's Bay harbourfront entrance with a \$3-million infrastructure investment. It was proposed at that time to be supported by the same amounts by the other two levels of government.

1720

This is a very important watershed in my riding of Pickering—Scarborough East, and I was absolutely thrilled that that resolution received unanimous consent from all three parties in our Legislature. I think that happened for a couple of reasons. I think it's because we all agreed that sometimes it just makes sense to support particular projects, no matter what party stripe you come from, no matter what side of the House you sit on.

In this case, safety was a compelling reason to support the restoration of the harbourfront entrance in Frenchman's Bay. Safety was a huge issue—is a huge issue—because, on a navigational map, Frenchman's Bay harbour is identified as one of the most dangerous harbours in all of Ontario. Of course, many economic and tourism benefits are going to come from that harbour entrance being restored: There will be more boats; there will be more tourism; there will be more spending. There will be a boost to the local economy, and it will restore the harbour entrance to a level where we will have—I think it's 1,500 boats we used to have at that harbour entrance, as opposed to the mere few hundred that are currently there.

Most importantly, and last but not least, the most, I think, compelling point was that there were, and there are, many ecological benefits to improving that harbourfront entrance. When I was doing my research for that project and developing that resolution to present here in the Legislature—I've actually used this approach in subsequent initiatives on behalf of my constituents in Pickering—Scarborough East: first and foremost, listening to people, listening to what people see are the issues and the opportunities, and talking to all the stakeholders.

I also learned from that exercise that it is important to consult the experts. I recall conferring with the head of geography and ecology at the University of Toronto, Scarborough campus, who actually joined me in my constituency office and undertook to give me some expert advice on whether this project should proceed. As we know, when we look at changing things, there are different views, and not everyone may be on board. Indeed, not absolutely everybody in my riding is totally supportive of the harbourfront entrance expansion, but I feel it's my job to get that expert advice and listen to people. I think this approach, quite frankly, has served me well; it has served other members of this House very well—

Interjection.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: It is, and I think at the end of the day that's one of the reasons it was, I think, fairly easy for all sides of this House to support that project. The benefits were there; the risks were low, if not nonexistent; and it was a shovel-ready project. Not only did all the parties in this House agree to it, but all levels of government ended up contributing to the project, including the federal government. I think it was on July 1 of last year, when we got all the funding secured by all levels of government, that it was announced. So that was fantastic.

Hon. Jeff Leal: What a great gift for Canada Day.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: It was a great Canada Day gift for Pickering—Scarborough East.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Had a parade?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Well, we did. We had a Canada Day parade, and we had lots of things going on.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Free hamburgers?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Free hamburgers, as the member from Peterborough is mentioning. It was a great day.

It's a change in the community. The big trucks are out there building the new barges. It's causing, of course, some disruption in the community as this project unfolds for the next while. This is the west side of the Frenchman's Bay harbour.

People in my riding also know that on the east side of the harbour, there is a huge restoration project at the waterfront at the foot of Liverpool Road. That was disruptive, too. There was lots of construction and dust. But at the end of the day, they got a beautiful community centre that combines great retail opportunities, as well as waterfront activities for everybody to enjoy. So I think as the Frenchman's Bay harbour entrance project continues, we'll get closer to seeing the benefits that I talked about before.

I mentioned that the Great Lakes are important to my riding because of the water that defines many sides of my riding: Lake Ontario on the south side, Highland Creek defines the southwest side of my riding, and the Rouge River, which I mentioned before, flows right through my riding into Lake Ontario. We all know about the Rouge Park, that it's moving forward to being a great national park. There are many residents in my riding who are very concerned about and are focused on the ecological condi-

tions of that and the preservation of all the watersheds around that.

Again, residents in my community and others nearby have participated actively in public consultations about the proposed Rouge National Park, and while there are some issues, such as the transit issues to and from the park, and while there are many opportunities, new business and tourism opportunities, the main concern, as I've heard attending those public consultations, is that people want a balance. They want a balance of these ecological conditions, respect for the watersheds, while looking at new ways to engage communities in this exciting national park that we're going to have. The park's there already, of course. It's a matter of refocusing it as a national park.

Interjection.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Yes, it's incredible how many people live right nearby it. Tens of thousands of people live right next to the Rouge Park, and Lake Ontario is, as part of that park, paramount.

Mr. Randy Hillier: You guys don't want to give it to the feds.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I think actually we are well under way to moving that forward in terms of an arrangement with the federal government because, at the end of the day, everybody wants to enjoy that park. Everyone wants to enjoy the waterways around that, and I'm very hopeful that people will see more details of that shortly.

But going back to the Great Lakes Protection Act, Speaker, I think we need to recognize what it is going to achieve for us in terms of going forward: what we don't have now; what we'll have in the future. It will help protect and restore the Great Lakes so that they are drinkable, swimmable and fishable—sounds like a logo or a slogan, maybe, that we can use going forward.

Hon. Mario Sergio: Sounds fishy.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Sounds fishy. Indeed, it does.

People do need that kind of protection because sometimes I think we take it for granted. We take for granted the water we drink, the food we enjoy, the electricity, the employment, the enjoyment—all those things that are indeed associated with the Great Lakes, yet the science shows that three of our four Great Lakes are indeed in decline. So we do need new solutions to some of the problems that have contributed to that.

There's much to protect, and we know that the Great Lakes are one of those key underpinning things in Ontario's economy—not something you think of every day, but that is definitely there.

The lakes contribute billions of dollars of wealth annually, supplying energy, providing water for industry, agriculture, shipping goods, recreation and tourism, and that I see as only growing.

I know in the region of Durham where I live, there's been some discussion about if we should have a food terminal in Oshawa, and if that was to be pursued, it would be adjacent to the lake. You can see how our local

and provincial economy intersects with the Great Lakes—in this case, Lake Ontario.

The Great Lakes, as I said before, provide over 80% of our drinking water, and that's something I know people take for granted sometimes. We all turn our tap on or get water out of the filtration system on our fridges. We're really blessed to be able to have that in Ontario, because we certainly know that is not the case in other parts of the world. So we need to protect what we have and ensure that it's there for the future, and the Great Lakes Protection Act would create the tools to help make the Great Lakes be there for us in the future—for us, our children and our grandchildren.

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We're lucky in Ontario to have leading legislation that covers specific areas, such as drinking water. However, we don't really have the tools necessary to achieve that vision for the future, and we heard about the need to have that, so this legislation will bring players together, in addition to what's already happened and leading up to the reintroduction of this bill. We need to keep focused on the clear, science-based targets, so the act allows further development to set these targets.

Speaker, you see that in I think almost everything our government puts forward—evidence-based, target-based—because at the end of the day there are more demands than maybe our resources allow, so things have to be evidence based. Going back to my Frenchman's Bay example, you'll recall I stated that I consulted the experts, I asked for the expert opinion, and that professor from U of T Scarborough indeed endorsed the Frenchman's Bay harbour and in fact said that it would not compete with other important environmental initiatives to preserve the ecological conditions of, in this case, Frenchman's Bay.

I think it is important we continue to consult with experts. It is important that we have targets going forward. Certainly in my riding of Pickering-Scarborough East, with so much wonderful water around our communities, whether it's in the Scarborough part of my riding, whether it's in the Pickering part of my riding, our community, and I believe all other communities in Ontario, value that. They want to make sure we're wisely protecting that, carefully making the right kinds of investments, and that our strategies will result in the preservation of the lakes for not just us today, but our children, our grandchildren and generations to come.

I thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to this important piece of legislation, and I look forward to further debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Harris: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an opportunity again to address Bill 6, the Great Lakes Protection Act. I know the minister is over here just trying to get his third party back onside after some of the concerns I think that they in fact shared with the party of the official opposition.

I did listen intently to some of the comments that the third party made—very valuable comments. I know the

member, after my remarks, from Timiskaming—Cochrane commented on the agricultural community sharing some concerns with this bill.

The minister obviously just stated how the government's investment in Hamilton harbour recently had taken place, and so I ask—they've made that investment already—how come they need another layer of bureaucracy to do things that they've in fact already done?

I think that simply proves our point that this piece of legislation is just, as a member or the minister just recently stated, somewhat fishy. Again, the minister stated how they made that investment in Hamilton harbour, so how come this new act is even needed when the government is clearly making investments for our Great Lakes?

I'll get into, at a later time—the minister just recently stated, "Well, we need the tools." Well, the tools are already available out there. You look at the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement between Canada and the US, and the Canada and Ontario agreement. Those tools are already there. We go into shoreline regulations, the Planning Act, giving municipalities—the Conservation Authorities Act—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member for Kenora—Rainy River.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: It's a pleasure to stand up and to respond to some of the comments that have been made. First of all, I'd like to take a second to congratulate the member from Davenport on his first one-hour speech. It was very well done. I'm also pleased to respond to the comments made by the Minister of Consumer Services.

One of the themes that we've heard today is that we want our Great Lakes to be drinkable, swimmable and fishable. In Ontario—and in particular, in northern Ontario—we have an intimate relationship with our environment and with our lakes. It's important that we recognize that we have multiple uses for those lakes. We use the water to sustain ourselves. We drink water; we need it to live. There are a lot of people who rely on fishing, believe it or not, especially a lot of First Nations communities where they rely on fishing to sustain themselves.

We depend on it culturally, as I said, with First Nations communities, but also in non-First Nations communities. It has become a way of life for us. It doesn't seem to matter the season: Whether it's winter, summer, fall or spring, you'll always find people out and about and finding a way to make good use of our lakes.

We also depend on it economically. That's especially evident when it comes to industries like tourism. It's no secret that my own family has a tourist camp, and they depend on the quality of the lakes and the fish stock in order to be able to sustain themselves.

So we need legislation that respects the variety of uses. I appreciate the fact that there has been talk of needing clear, evidence-based and science-based targets to ensure that it is fair for all of the uses that we have.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Oakville.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to join the debate in support of Bill 6 and to address the comments made by the Minister of Consumer Services, which I think were very well articulated.

There are people that take a very strong environmental interest in the Great Lakes, there are people that take another interest in the Great Lakes, and there are other people that I think take it for granted.

Some of the statements that I'm hearing from the official opposition are, "We have the tools in place. We should just take it for granted. Don't worry; be happy. It'll be okay." But what we don't realize is that the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence River—the region surrounding the Great Lakes—if you include Ontario and you include the Great Lakes states, there are 56 million jobs in that basin. There is \$5.1 trillion worth of GDP in that region. So if you don't have an interest in the environment, if you don't have an interest in ecosystems, maybe you have an interest in the business value and why you should be reinvesting in this asset we have.

We've got a wonderful natural asset right on our shoreline that covers—the vast majority of the borders of Ontario, to the south, border on the Great Lakes and on the St. Lawrence River. It just seems to me that we should be taking care of that, that we should be bringing in legislation that allows for that asset to be protected for future generations. I think Bill 6 does that. Bill 6 is a step forward.

Others in the third party have said, "Maybe it doesn't go far enough. Perhaps it can be improved along the way." There's probably some truth to that. But it seems to me that anybody who might suggest that this isn't needed, or that perhaps this is superfluous to other legislation that is in place, I think is wrong.

I think this legislation is very important. I think people in my community of Oakville, a lakeshore community, would find that this piece of legislation is probably something that's long overdue and something that certainly should be supported.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock.

Ms. Laurie Scott: It's a pleasure to speak today and give comment to the Minister of Consumer Services with respect to Bill—I can't find the number, but it's the Great Lakes Protection Act—

Interjection: Bill 6.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Bill 6.

As my colleague and the PC critic, the member from Kitchener—Conestoga, has said: rules, rules, rules. We have lots of rules and regulations. Even the members from the third party have commented that they have so many rules and regulations out there, the government agencies or bodies that are to implement these don't have time; they're not implementing what's already there.

So we have this government that continues to have opportunities that they think they can duplicate, overlap and conflict, which seems to be a consistent theme over there.

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Of course we want to protect the Great Lakes. We're all kind of indirectly involved. You can get from the riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock to the Great Lakes and onwards, so we are all concerned about the quality and the protection of the Great Lakes. But we have so many acts out there already—the Ontario Water Resources Act, the Clean Water Act, the Safe Drinking Water Act, the Nutrient Management Act. Farmers have done a great job in following those, helping us to prevent runoff that would, in some way, affect the water quality. They are the best stewards of the land, the farmers. I can go on—the Conservation Authorities Act, and we're all involved in the conservation authorities. This legislation dips into a lot of their domain.

What we have said, and what our critic from Kitchener-Conestoga has repeatedly said, is that the tools are in the toolbox in the rules, the regulations, the acts that are already before us. Maybe we should use them better. I think collectively, we can work towards that. I end my comments with that, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The minister has two minutes to respond.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Thank you, Speaker. First, let me acknowledge the members who have contributed to this debate this afternoon: the member from Kitchener-Conestoga; the member from Kenora-Rainy River—thank you for bringing the northern perspective to this discussion; the member from Oakville, who is also a member who has a waterway as part of his riding boundaries, I believe; and, last but not least, the member from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock.

I'm glad to hear that there is common ground when it comes to protecting the Great Lakes in our province. I heard that from the discussion from all sides of the House here. I have heard some concerns, particularly from the official opposition, and my reaction to that would be: Let's get this to committee. Everyone has some strong views on this; then let's get it to committee and see where it goes, because we have what I believe is common ground on this bill: that we all want to protect the Great Lakes today. We want to protect it for our future.

So let's bring our feedback, our ideas to committee. Let's move this forward and find this as another example of how to make minority government work. We have a common cause and a purpose, as I found here in the Legislature, a shared vision around my Frenchman's Bay motion. I sense there's common ground here with the reintroduction of this act, and I look forward to seeing this go to committee and that we do what's right to protect our environment, our Great Lakes, balancing it out, of course, with all the other interests and issues, and I think we can do that at committee going forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: It's a pleasure to rise here in the House this afternoon and debate and discuss Bill 6, the Great Lakes Protection Act, 2013.

As you know, Madam Speaker, I have always been a huge advocate here in this chamber for water protection and waterpower development and how important water really is. It's a little disturbing when we hear the government talk—and it is talk—about how they care about the environment when you see industrial wind farms intruding upon our landscape throughout the province. They, in fact, are allowing industrial-sized wind farms to be developed on protected lands; the Oak Ridges moraine, in particular, in my riding. We have also heard of instances where trees with eagles' nests have been harvested so that these industrial-sized wind turbines can go on.

So the credibility this government is putting toward the environment is somewhat lacking, and of course what this bill should be called is "an act to appease Liberal political supporters and cronies," because this bill is just another classic example of the Liberals attempting to pass needless legislation in order to keep or make a few friends—in this case, radical environmental groups.

The stated purposes of this bill are "to protect and restore the ecological health of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River basin; and ... to create opportunities for individuals and communities to become involved in the protection and restoration of the ecological health of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River basin."

These seem like worthy purposes at first glance, but what the Liberals fail to mention is that there are already excessive, much-legislated designs in place to do just what they're proposing. The Ministry of Natural Resources already has the power to regulate shorelines for watershed management under the Conservation Authorities Act, while municipalities have the authority to prohibit development of shorelines under the Planning Act.

Despite all of these existing regulations, the Liberals want to create yet a third regulator for Ontario shorelines and allow the Ministry of the Environment to enter the fray and give the ministry the authority to collect fees for non-compliance.

Not only will this bill muddy the regulatory waters surrounding Ontario shorelines and the Great Lakes, potentially making it more difficult for any meaningful protection to take place and stymying any potential for responsible economic development, but I worry that the proposed regulations may actually outright conflict with existing legislation.

Existing Ontario water legislation, such as the Clean Water Act, the Environmental Protection Act, the Nutrient Management Act, the Safe Drinking Water Act, the Water Opportunities Act and the water resources act, may all be in conflict with proposed legislation under Bill 6.

It seems that unlike what this bill leads you to believe, it's not that the Liberals lack the legislation to get the job done and protect Ontario lakes but, rather, they lack the political will and competent decision-making skills to do so. Instead, they'd rather rely on feel-good, save-face legislation that appeases a radical environmental base. So

it seems to be yet another example of a long line of Liberal regulatory duplication, overlap and conflict.

This proposed bill is long on generalities and very short on specifics. It leaves all decision-making and priority setting to the Ministry of the Environment and proposes the creation of yet another unelected, unaccountable board: the guardians' council. Under the mandate of this bill, the Great Lakes Guardians' Council would identify priorities, sources of funding and areas in need of remediation, as well as advise the minister on setting targets, establishing interjurisdictional agreements, and approving proposals and initiatives.

If passed, this bill would allow the creation of this council, which would be full of Liberal cronies and radical environmentalists. They would be allowed to sidestep the Legislative Assembly here and create cumbersome and excessive legislation that would hamper the home building, farming and manufacturing that Ontario depends on to grow and prosper.

It also must be noted that the protection and use of the Great Lakes is a binational concern. The creation of a provincial board to address a multi-state issue seems irresponsible, as its decisions may only confuse and hamper good work that is already under way between Canada and the United States.

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There already exists between Canada and the United States the International Joint Commission, the IJC; the Great Lakes Water Quality Board; the Great Lakes Executive Committee; and the management committee of the Canada-Ontario agreement. These international agreements all serve to realize the priorities set out in the United States-Canada Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement.

To coordinate meaningful and effective remediation efforts for the Great Lakes, the provincial government must work with, not against, our partners by using the forums already in place. A Great Lakes governance framework between both Canada and the United States, and between the federal and provincial government, has reliably functioned for over 40 years.

So the question remains: Why have the Liberals decided that Ontario suddenly needs even more regulation to protect the Great Lakes when it is obvious that the legislation already exists? Madam Speaker, the answer to this question may lie in the fact that the proposed Great Lakes Protection Act is the work of the Great Lakes alliance, which intensely lobbied the Liberals to include in Bill 6 the guardians' council in order to allow this lobby to shape Ontario's environmental policy.

The Great Lakes alliance is a grouping of six powerful environmental organizations operating in Ontario, including Environmental Defence, the Sierra Club and Great Lakes United, which is run by United Auto Workers Local 55 in Buffalo, New York.

While this bill proposes that its legislation will allow public bodies—including municipalities and conservation authorities—more control, it only gives these authorities the token role of requesting new regulatory areas. In fact,

the true power ultimately rests with cabinet, which must approve an initiative at the proposal and finalization stages, and with the guardians' council, which is responsible for developing and implementing proposals.

Of course, this is not to say that environmental groups are all radical or fundamentally bad. Indeed, two responsible and respected environmental groups in Ontario—Nature Conservancy of Canada and the Ontario Headwaters Institute—have expressed a number of concerns with this bill. They worry, as I do, that the Liberals do not truly care about protecting Ontario waters; rather, that they are more concerned about their own political well-being, and that they are focusing on passing the bill only to appease the radical environmental lobby rather than focusing on proactive and effective measures and using already-existing tools.

It seems that time and time again, Madam Speaker, instead of making the decisions necessary to enact real, positive change, the Liberals instead keep attempting to reinvent the wheel. An example of this in the bill is the series of new regulatory areas called GFIs, or geographically focused initiatives, to deal with a long list of potential issues.

Of course, what this bill does not tell us is that areas of concern have already been established under the COA. Furthermore, the United States and Canada already have the power to designate priority watersheds under the IJC's International Watersheds Initiative. Again, we're seeing some repetition here over regulation, duplication, conflict.

Of course, my Liberal colleagues will retort that despite all the legislation that exists—that seems to be working, I should add—we need new legislation and new tools to deal with changing conditions and new priorities. What is baffling is that when questioned as to what these new and changing priorities are that must be dealt with by passing even more legislation, the Liberal government has answered that this is a matter the guardians' council will determine after the bill has been passed. So if the Liberal government does not even know what the priorities are, how can they propose legislation to deal with the problems and priorities that may not even exist? Once again, the answer points to that the Liberals' true purpose in passing this bill is for their own good rather than the good of Ontario.

Through passing this bill, they aim to centralize decision-making authority and to empower and appease their political supporters and cronies. In this effort to concentrate their power within the Ministry of the Environment, the Liberals are disappointingly ready and willing to create regulatory chaos that will cost the government millions of dollars and years of time to sort out, not to mention distracting from any real environmental protection and stymying the economic activity that Ontario so desperately needs.

A Liberal government deciding to put political considerations before responsible decision-making and, in the process, costing the province dearly: This seems like a narrative we have heard before, and a narrative that is

set to cost the province up to \$1 billion, like the Liberal gas plant scandal.

On the matter of money and responsible decision-making, it should be brought to everyone's attention that this bill makes absolutely no mention of cost. Without any financial information on Bill 6, we do not know how much the formation and maintenance of the guardians' council will cost, how much the creating and administering of the GFIs will cost, nor do we know how much it will cost to implement the array of new regulations that the Liberals propose. Other than the likelihood that some regulatory actions and actors will be funded through the fining for non-compliance with the regulations that will come from Bill 6, there is no mention of where the money will come from.

This is especially concerning given that we do not even know the specifics of the priorities that this bill proposes to address. We are also left unaware of where the financial powers of the guardians' council—a non-elected, non-accountable, politicized body—will lie. Will their financial powers lie with cabinet? This is a question that must be answered.

This leaves us with a lot of unanswered questions and no price tag. This bill serves as another example of why our province is in such a massive debt situation—and why it cannot, under a Liberal government, that can't get out of its debt. The Liberal government's costly, in-

effective and politically motivated legislation serves to explain how our province is in this dire economic situation. Window-dressing proposed legislation such as this one, Bill 6, just shows that this Liberal government has still not learned its lesson and is still not serious about addressing the jobs and debt crisis.

Ontario is blessed with the Great Lakes, and we are fortunate to live in a province that benefits from the largest freshwater ecosystem on the planet. The Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River basin is a fantastic resource, integral to the well-being of Ontario citizens. Many of our province's economic activities, such as farming, manufacturing, electricity generation, and shipping, all depend on this water system, and the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River basin provides defining natural features that make the area a wonderful place to live, work and raise a family.

What we have is, again, a piece of legislation brought forward by the government which actually does nothing but stymie our economy and the interests of—thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I must bring to the attention of the member that it is now 6 p.m.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): This House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. Wednesday.

The House adjourned at 1800.

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No. 10

Nº 10

ISSN 1180-2987

Legislative Assembly of Ontario

Second Session, 40th Parliament

Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

Deuxième session, 40^e législature

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)



Journal des débats (Hansard)

Wednesday 6 March 2013

Mercredi 6 mars 2013

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 6 March 2013

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 6 mars 2013

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning.
Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

NON-PROFIT HOUSING
CO-OPERATIVES STATUTE LAW
AMENDMENT ACT, 2013
LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT DES LOIS
EN CE QUI CONCERNE
LES COOPÉRATIVES DE LOGEMENT
SANS BUT LUCRATIF

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 4, 2013, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 14, An Act to amend the Co-operative Corporations Act and the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 in respect of non-profit housing co-operatives and to make consequential amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 14, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les sociétés coopératives et la Loi de 2006 sur la location à usage d'habitation en ce qui concerne les coopératives de logement sans but lucratif et apportant des modifications corrélatives à d'autres lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I was listening to the prayer this morning, I think it's a Buddhist prayer—after the Lord's Prayer—and there was that beautiful line, "Everything vanishes and reappears again and again." It's appropriate that we prayed that prayer because here we are with a bill that vanished and appears again and again, hopefully for the last time.

Again, a shout-out to those from the co-operative housing movement who are here and who have been here on this particular issue, I think, since 2004. I've often said that being in this place is a little like pushing an elephant uphill. Occasionally it budges, so today we witness the elephant budging just a little bit, taking a long, long time.

Needless to say, off the top, we're going to support this. We wished it had passed before the prorogation. I know today we're going to hear more about prorogation, but we wished that prorogation hadn't happened and we wish that this bill had happened before the House rose. Hopefully, the amount of money that's been spent, since prorogation, on this issue is a small amount.

In a nutshell, for those listening and watching who perhaps have not heard this before, although it's unlikely that you haven't—it's been on the agenda, as I say, many times—this is a bill that's simply going to take the disputes that happen in co-ops between tenants and the co-op boards out of the court system and take them to the tribunal where they belong.

I want to give some shout-outs to my co-ops right off the bat in Parkdale-High Park: We've got Dufferin Grove; we've got Fort York; we've got John Bruce; just down the street from myself, Junction; Swansea—and also, of course, just an acknowledgment that the co-op movement is not only about housing; this bill is. But the co-op movement is far larger than housing. We have a groundbreaking co-op that I also want to give a shout-out to: the West End Food Co-op in Parkdale-High Park that has now opened a store, just around the corner from where I live. It's wonderful. So, incredible kudos to the co-op movement.

We in the New Democratic Party would like to see more co-ops right across the spectrum of human endeavours, and particularly in the housing market. I have to also, in talking about housing, mention sadly the defeat of our federal bill that called for a national housing strategy. That's sad. It is sad, I think, especially for our neighbours to the right here, the Progressive Conservatives, because when I think about the co-op movement, I can't help but think about St. Lawrence Market. Really, when St. Lawrence Market was developed back in the 1970s, it was the gold standard of mixed housing. Back in the day, in the 1970s—and it's still the gold standard, sadly. Back in the day when that was developed, there was a Conservative at city hall, there was a Conservative here and there was a Conservative in Ottawa. Somehow, under Conservative governments, we got this groundbreaking project off the ground.

For those of you who aren't Torontonians, who don't know St. Lawrence Market, what you will find if you go down there is, of course, St. Lawrence Market itself, which is exciting and a tourist attraction, but all around there you will find housing and you'll find mixed housing. You'll find housing that is TCHC, you'll find housing that is commercial and market-driven, and you'll find co-ops all around there. And here's the beautiful thing about St. Lawrence Market: You won't be able to tell the difference, one to the other. Everybody lives and works well together.

How did it start? Well, let me tell you the story. I learned the story myself since being elected. We had a

visioning day and a visioning week, actually, in Parkdale—High Park on issues that beset our community. Pre-eminent among them was the issue of lack of affordable housing, and we invited David Crombie, Conservative mayor of Toronto at the time. Remember, we used to call him the “tiny perfect mayor”? I’m not so sure. He’s tiny for sure. And particularly where St. Lawrence Market is concerned, we think that was a good move.

We invited him to talk to us about how he ever got the St. Lawrence Market development off the ground. He came and he was very gracious. He spoke to us and he said, out of his own mouth, “It all started with a co-op”—that that entire gold standard of affordable housing started with a co-op. We took that as advice. We decided to look in our own riding at, how can we get other co-ops going? So we in Parkdale—High Park set out on an adventure. It’s an ongoing adventure. The end of the story hasn’t happened yet.

We have a Tibetan community, a very well-entrenched and organized Tibetan community. They were interested in housing. We suggested the co-op model. We got a grant from CMHC, and we’re currently, and we have been for the last two years, looking for a place to do this. Here’s the problem, and I’m going to point to a problem with starting a co-op in the province of Ontario: Historically, 20% to 25% of projects developed under social housing—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Well, folks, it seems that we have about six sidebars going on. I can’t hear a word the member is saying. As I say always, if you want to have a real heated discussion or something fantastic, take it outside. I would suggest that we cut it down a notch or two on the decibel level.

Go ahead.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It cost me a few seconds, but thank you.

Where was I? To backtrack, the Tibetan housing co-op, which we’re still in the process of trying to get going, is hampered. It’s very, very difficult to get a co-op off the ground now in Ontario. This is not what we should be doing. We should be enabling co-ops to get off the ground, and we should be doing everything possible to allow them to keep functioning. That clearly was true in the 1970s, when the St. Lawrence Market redevelopment project got off the ground and became the gold standard, and it’s true today in 2013.

So I hope—here’s the hope—that as far as the co-op movement or housing is concerned, that this is just a very small step in, I hope, an ongoing revision of government policies around not only affordable housing—I’m going to talk about them in a moment—but particularly in enabling co-ops to get up, get functioning and continue to function, because truly they are the cornerstone of any affordable housing response, and that’s what we need.

As I said, it’s sad to see a Conservative majority government vote down the possibility of a national housing strategy when clearly in their own history, the history of their party, they’ve been advocates for affordable

housing. I hope that my colleagues to the right here will talk to their colleagues in Ottawa.

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So what is the situation in Ontario where housing is concerned? Well, it’s absolutely and irrevocably bleak. In fact, it’s bleaker than in any other province in Canada right now. We have approximately 160,000 families waiting on affordable housing lists, the average wait being between 10 and 12 years. That is, I think by anybody’s standards, completely and absolutely unacceptable. Here’s a fact: In 2009, Ontario spent \$64 per capita on affordable housing—half the average of other Canadian provinces. This particular administration has nothing to be proud of where housing is concerned.

I spoke on another topic the other day about the number of homeless deaths. We’ve seen six since January; we’ve seen over 700 since the 1980s. The rate of homeless deaths has increased under this current regime. It used to be considered a national disaster; now we just step over the bodies that sleep on the grates. It’s as if we don’t care anymore.

I remember my very first portfolio when I was elected, lo, those almost seven years ago; it was housing, and I remember the now Attorney General was the housing minister back then. I remember very well—he might too—sitting at a committee with him, at government agencies, and asking him; I said, “Here are the stats, Mr. Housing Minister. It actually costs more to keep someone in the shelter system than it does to provide affordable housing for them. Why are we doing this? It makes no moral sense and it makes no economic sense.” To give him his due, he agreed. The then housing minister agreed with that. He said, “Yes, we should be doing more for housing.” The sad reality is, that was almost seven years ago, and here we are. Nothing, really, has changed.

Interjection: It takes time; it takes time.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Well, as I said, pushing an elephant uphill, sometimes it budges. It has budged very, very slowly with this bill. We need that elephant to start running up that hill where affordable housing is concerned.

Not only do we have 160,000 women, men and children waiting, but this is an increase of 6%—we’re increasing those waiting lists—since January 2012. The simple reality is, both the federal government and the provincial government have gotten out of the business of providing housing for their citizens. This is unacceptable. This is absolutely unacceptable.

We have about 13 million people in Ontario. I point to other jurisdictions in the world. There are nine million people in Sweden. In Sweden, they managed to build 100,000 units of affordable housing a year for 10 years. There is no homelessness problem in Sweden; quite frankly, it doesn’t exist. It’s doable to eliminate that wait-list, and here’s the amazing news: It doesn’t only rely on tax dollars to do it. In fact, a bill that I put forward—that I’m going to be bringing back again soon, this spring—on inclusionary zoning would allow us to provide up to

12,000 units a year of affordable housing without one tax dollar being spent.

How do you perform that miracle? Let me describe to you how. It's the same way other jurisdictions around the world that are cash-strapped provide affordable housing. Here's what you do—first of all, here's what we do in this Legislature. What we do is provide a change to the Planning Act so that municipalities can bring in inclusionary zoning. That's all my bill wanted to do: just allow them the option, the possibility, of bringing in inclusionary zoning.

What is inclusionary zoning? It's the requirement—and it varies from municipality to municipality—that developers who build, in my bill, over 50 units have to provide a certain element within that building or development of affordable housing. It doesn't even say what kind of affordable housing. It could be rent-to-own, it could be flat out rent—there are many, many things that municipalities could do if they had the tools to do them. They don't right now, because what happens right now is, if a municipality tries to do that, tries to require—for example, in Toronto, instead of section 37 dollars—dollars for housing from their developers, then that developer could take them to the OMB and win, because there is no revision to the Planning Act at the provincial level.

So, there's an option—inclusionary zoning—that this government could have picked up on. In fact, it passed this bill on to second reading; of course, it never got to committee. Now that we have a minority government, I'm sending a plea across the floor that when it comes back again, let's actually act on it. Let's send it to committee and let's get it past the committee and let's bring it back for third reading: a very simple, tax-free way of providing housing and one that I must say just about every municipality signed on to. I have a file this thick of letters from municipalities, some of whom have actually passed resolutions at their councils in support of my bill. So let's move on that; let's move on affordable housing. But to get back to this bill, wow, let's just do it.

It was interesting. I had a couple of Conservative members yesterday on my radio show, called 3 Women, for those who are interested: 89.5 FM every Tuesday morning at 9. That's the plug. Christine Elliott was there, the member from Whitby-Oshawa and deputy leader, and also the member from Burlington was on the show. They were talking about some of the frustrations of this House, and this was one of them, one where I think we have agreement around all parties, and that is how slowly things move, how slow it is to get even the smallest thing done here. I think our constituents are quite frankly gobsmacked at the process that it takes to get even something this small through the legislative process. They had made suggestions. I'm not going to warrant their suggestions or to put forward any of my own right now, but simply say that this is something that should have happened long ago. This should have happened long ago, and it should have happened much more seamlessly than it is happening.

The fact is that the housing co-operative folk have had to come back time and again, that it's been on the radar

since 2004, and really, it's almost a regulatory change. Really, this shouldn't be an earth-shattering law. There's something very wrong with a process that would take almost 10 years to get something like this passed. So that's the broader picture.

Mr. Speaker, even the Drummond commission talks about the sad reality of this province getting out of the housing business. The sad reality, of course—even Don Drummond mentioned the federal government getting out, and Don Drummond, as we know, is not known as being a rabid leftist in his prognostications.

So to summarize here: Co-op housing is one of the cornerstones of affordable housing. It has to be part of the mix. We as government have to make it easier. In fact, we have to facilitate, I would say, new co-ops getting built and up and running. That is not the case. I've discovered that first-hand. When you can get a sizable grant from CMHC, when you can get people to step up with money of their own and still face a mountain of red tape and a nightmare just to get a co-op off the ground, that's not good enough.

What we need is what we had, and that is exemplified, as I said right off the top, in the gold standard: St. Lawrence Market. And it's not about partisanship; it's about people just getting back into the business and feeling it's their moral obligation to provide housing for their citizens.

We're in a crisis situation. We had a report come in last week that showed that 50% of our full-time jobs in the GTA are precarious; 50% of people in full-time jobs said they didn't know if they'd have that job next year. This is a pretty grim portrait of life in the GTA, and a very large part of that precariousness is their ability to maintain housing. When 50% of our renters are paying more than 50% of their income on rent, this is a precarious situation. We need to have answers for it.

We need to have answers for the homeless deaths that are taking place on our streets. Six people have died on the streets since January 1. It used to be considered a national disaster. Where's that sense of urgency? Where is the sense that we need to do something about this? Where is the moral indignation that it's not okay in one of the world's richest countries and richest jurisdictions to have our citizens dying on the streets for lack of a bed? That's not acceptable. It's not acceptable, and the solution doesn't always start in Ottawa. It starts here. It starts at the city level, too, but it starts here. This is where we have to have some political will to provide housing.

0920

We have not had that political will for two separate administrations now. We haven't had that political will since 1995. That's not good enough. And it's not about who is in power—it's not about what political party is power—it's about the will of those folks sitting around the cabinet table to actually get something done. As I said, we had the gold standard produced under Tory administrations. We can have it done under any administration. The question for this administration is, why isn't it being done? Why isn't it even being entertained under this administration?

This administration promised 20,000 units. It hasn't delivered. We, in our platform, put forward a minimum of 10,000 new builds—minimum. Where is the discussion about new builds for housing? It's gone. It's off the table. And when we look at social assistance reviews, when we look at how we're going to get people out from under poverty, housing is the critical determinant of that. If they don't have housing, they can't get a job. If they can't get a job, they will be relegated to poverty. And they will be relegated to poverty if they don't have housing. It's a vicious cycle, and we have no answers in this place—no answers whatsoever.

So just to summarize, yes, of course we support this bill—absolutely. My goodness, it's a baby step, a baby step that should have been taken 10 years ago. Finally, much talk later, it will maybe, I hope, be passed. Let's speed it through committee, let's get it back here and let's get it done.

But more than this bill, Mr. Speaker, let's see some gumption on the housing file from my friends across the aisle. Let's see some action on the housing file. Let's see some new bills. Let's see something as simple as inclusionary zoning or density bonusing put into the mix. It doesn't even cost a tax dollar, so we can't use the deficit as an excuse here. Let's see some solutions. Because my goodness, we have a problem, and part of the problem is to begin to open our eyes to see that we have one. It's admitting we have a problem. We have a problem when people are dying on our streets. We have a problem.

Everyone here should have those deaths on their conscience. We are charged, at the very least, to prevent deaths, and housing would do that. So let's build some housing. Let's pass Bill 14. Let's get on it with it. My goodness, let's get on with it. Let's give that elephant a good push so it can get over the hill this time on this one. Let's give our poor friends in the co-operative housing movement a break so they don't have to come back here day in and day out.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Mauro: I want to thank the member from Parkdale—High Park for her comments.

I would mention one thing for our friends in the gallery from the co-op sector, who are back here today. There's been a bit of a consistent theme in this debate over the last few days when it comes to the effect of prorogation on this particular piece of legislation. I think it's fair to say that that angle or that theme has been slightly overstated. It's important to remind our friends in the gallery that while this was at second reading in September/October of last year, had it passed second reading it would have been referred to committee, and instead of second reading here, we might have been at third reading now. It wouldn't have advanced things that much further down the road than they currently are. And of course it would have been up to the committee it was referred to to make the decision on when the bill would be called and what amendments would go forward. I think it's important to state that.

In terms of the consistent support for the bill that I'm hearing across the way, we're happy to hear that. In effect, trying to diminish what's being done here—I would say that if it was that easy to do, both of the opposition parties, while they were in power in the last little while, had an opportunity to do this very same thing. Of course, as you know, the main piece of this is taking referrals out of the court system and referring them to the Landlord and Tenant Board. That's the main piece of this. Each of the opposition parties had an opportunity to do that when they were in government, and for whatever reason—I wasn't here at the time—chose not to do that.

The last thing I would say is that, on the long-term affordable housing strategy, we are concerned as well. The feds seem to be stepping away from this—the agreement ends soon. Of course, an even more serious announcement from the federal government very recently—we've seen the federal government downgrade how much money they're going to spend on infrastructure across all of Canada from \$6 billion down to \$3.9 billion. We in Ontario are committing much more than that just in our province alone. We need the feds to give us a little help when it comes to these issues as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jack MacLaren: Mr. Speaker, there's a lot of merit in this bill. It's intended to help people who are having a tough time—low income, can't afford proper housing—and we want to provide them with non-profit housing, and we want to look after them in a fair and responsible way. I think it's an obligation as a society. We have an obligation to help those in our society who can't help themselves.

The intention of this bill is to streamline the system of solving problems and disputes, and we applaud that and we support that. It appears that there has been significant cost in going to court as opposed to going to the Landlord and Tenant Board to solve problems, and this would seem like a logical thing to do.

We have some minor concern that not enough consultation has been done at this point with landlords and tenants and advocacy groups that speak for these people across the province. We would like to hear from those people before this bill goes to third reading. The committee could travel, hear these folks and better make a decision on what the appropriate thing to do here is to try to help these people.

We're aware that this is an opportunity to do something good. We embrace that; we look forward to that. We have to do it in an appropriate manner. We have to do it in a responsible manner. If we do this right, it will be a good thing. It will also be a good thing for landlords as well as tenants, and it will be an encouragement for landlords to invest in more non-profit housing. I think we have to keep that in mind. It's not just a one-sided story to help those who need help, which is unquestionable; we have to look out for both sides. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Miss Monique Taylor: I listened intently. I like that word that my other—

Interjection.

Miss Monique Taylor: Pardon? Anyways.

The member from Parkdale—High Park has it right on when she talks about the history of housing in our province and in our country. We need to make sure that we're supporting co-operative housing. We need to make sure that we move this bill forward and get it into committee. If the Conservatives have some kinks that they want to work out, I'm sure that everybody can work together to find a way of moving this bill forward.

We need to make sure that we have more housing in this province. We need to make sure that people who aren't able to pay a full market-value rent are being able to have adequate housing, and I know that co-ops provide that. They work together as a community to make sure that everybody is living in good housing conditions.

I have several co-ops in my riding, and I work with them on a regular basis and have made very good friends with people in the co-ops on the Mountain. Everybody is working for the same goal, and that's to make sure that everybody has a happy, healthy place to raise their families.

So I completely support this bill. I'm looking forward to it getting to committee and making sure that they have a fair cost price looking at them, and when they have to deal with evictions and when tenants need the assistance of the tribunal board, that that will also be there to assist them. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Hon. John Gerretsen: I know the member opposite who just spoke knows of my passion for affordable housing as well. I've been involved in one way or another, I guess for the last 40 years, in municipal non-profits, private non-profits and co-op housing because I think that housing is an absolute right for people. I'm absolutely convinced of that.

Let's not forget—she talks a lot about what hasn't been done. But one of the opportunities that I had on behalf of the government back in 2005 was to sign that historic agreement with the federal government, the Martin federal government at the time, to provide \$600 million of new affordable housing to the people of Ontario; \$300 million came from the province and \$300 million came from the federal government. I don't know how many units were created, but I know they were in the thousands that were created as a result of that.

Now, dealing with this bill specifically, Speaker, the reality is that right now, if co-ops want to get rid of a tenant—and they're not really tenants, anyway—they have to go to the courts. Courts are not the best place to deal with eviction issues. Quite frankly, most judges don't like to deal with them. So why don't we use the expertise that's available in the Landlord and Tenant Board—the adjudicators who deal with these issues on an

ongoing basis—to deal with any kind of eviction notices that may be required of people who live in co-op housing? That's what this really is all about.

0930

The other issue is the waiver of fees with respect to low-income individuals. May I just remind the Conservatives, who may not be in favour of that, that actually we have that waiver-of-fee provision as well in other tribunals such as the Ontario Municipal Board, social services review boards etc., and they were initiated, by the way, by the true Progressive Conservatives who used to be in power here many, many years ago. We're not doing anything all that radical by adding that in this bill as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Parkdale—High Park has two minutes.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Thank you to everyone for their comments. I want to focus on a couple of them.

To the Attorney General: Housing is a human right, of course. It's what the United Nations has asked for and, in fact, it was a motion I introduced in this House that the government did not support. I wanted it enshrined in our Legislature that housing was a human right. It didn't pass over there.

The member from Thunder Bay—Atikokan knows full well that it is the government's and only the government's prerogative to bring bills back for third reading, and he knows full well that, had this bill gone forward and prorogation not happened, if it had seen committee time in a timely manner, this government could have passed it before Christmas. He knows that. That's just to correct the record.

Also, just to go back to two main points here: Co-op housing is one of the most cost-effective ways of providing affordable housing. This bill is a very small step. Yes, it should be passed, and in a timely manner. I hope that it goes in and out of committee quickly, and I hope that this government calls it back for third reading in a timely manner as well.

But more to the point, to my friends across the aisle: The fact remains that our province spends less than any other province on affordable housing. That is not a good record. We need political will from across the aisle to step up. We know the federal government isn't doing what they should; that doesn't get you off the hook. You need to step up. We need to have a plan, and it's a plan that needs to see new units being built, but also, lots of other solutions and tools can be used to provide housing without much cost—even at all—like inclusionary zoning.

So, yes, pass the bill. Yes, let's correct the record, and, by all means, let's get on with providing housing for people who need it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Thank you—
Applause.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I have one friend, Mr. Speaker—maybe two, with you. I've always considered you a friend, Mr. Speaker.

I want to start off by just making a few comments about the comments made by the member for Parkdale—High Park, and her efforts. I want to acknowledge the very positive contribution she has made and the extraordinary work she has done in this area.

When I was in my previous political life, when we had no federal or provincial housing programs, we built about 4,000 or 5,000 affordable housing units, which I think is a record in Canadian history in any municipality. It was done through a very grassroots partnership. We talked about some of the tool kits that we could create to do housing. The member from Parkdale—High Park has introduced ideas, and I think this government should look at many of them very seriously.

I always find that there are certain ironies in history. We almost had a national housing strategy in this country that was unprecedented. The Martin government was defeated on December 8 by the Conservatives and the NDP, and we lost our national housing policy, which many of us in the municipal world had worked very hard to achieve. It would have been the first time we had a national housing strategy, a national transportation strategy, a national climate change strategy and a national child care strategy—the four pillars of what I think are the four things that are most missing right now in our national dialogue. Our federal government, quite frankly, has abandoned us on all four.

My grandmother, who came from Ukraine, used to always say to me, “Glen, God never hits with a stick.” I always thought that there was great irony that now both the Liberals and New Democrats are in opposition; our party, federally, is led by a former NDP Premier of Ontario and the NDP is led by a former Liberal cabinet minister from Quebec. There are some lessons on the value of co-operation in that. My grandmother, I think, would always say, “That is karma.”

I think that there are places where this party agrees with the Conservatives—on tax policy and other areas. There are areas in which we agree with the NDP more. I think it behoves us all sometimes to be Ontarians before we are Liberals, Conservatives or New Democrats.

I've always believed—and I think if you go back to Bill Davis and David Crombie—one of the things that we should be able to offer every citizen in Ontario is a key to a safe place to live. I agree with members in a number of parties who have made this point, and I would consider my political career a failure in this province if within the next decade, every Ontarian doesn't have a key to a safe place to live—and not just a safe home. For many women who go home to violence, for children who go home to sexual abuse, the complexity of a safe place to live is not an easy one, and it is not an easy one to achieve.

While government spending is important—and in my community of Toronto Centre, with Regent Park and the West Don Lands, we have been building more affordable housing right now, in my community, than anywhere else. I'm working across party lines, across government, with Pam McConnell and Kristyn Wong-Tam and our school trustees, on an integrated neighbourhood plan.

We're doing some of the stuff that all of us have brought together in our previous experience, because Councillor McConnell as well has a lot of experience as a housing activist. We're doing some remarkable things with the private sector and community, without the government being at the table in a significant way. But I think all government has to come to the table.

The member for Northumberland—Quinte West made a comment about cheap shots at the federal government. I don't think this is a cheap shot. We have a real crisis coming in affordable housing. This is agricultural literacy week. As someone who comes from a family who had a farm in Alexandria, Ontario, I'm really glad that—those of us who now live in cities need to be much more literate about rural and agricultural Ontario.

One of the things that all of us, regardless of where we come from, have to be literate about is the importance of co-ops, because if the federal government does not start to renew its funding and its commitment to co-ops, our co-ops are going to go from being one of the most important sources of affordable housing and human dignity and choice. Co-ops are much more than just housing. They are a community and a culture of caring about your neighbour, and collaborative community-building. They reinforce the best qualities of our citizenship and the best character of ourselves as Canadians, in the spirit of how we want to live and care for each other and worry as much about our neighbour down the hall as we do about ourselves. Anyone who has ever lived in a co-op or has lived in a condo knows there's a very different kind of culture that often sets in, in both those places.

When the federal subsidies and the federal contributions to co-ops run out in the very near future, that is going to create an affordable housing crisis in many parts of Ontario. We are not asking the federal government for more money at this point. We are just simply asking them to renew their commitment and to maintain an active hand on finances on that file.

And why should they do that? Not just because former Premier Bob Rae did such a great job on co-ops, quite frankly. I mean, all you have to do in my constituency is walk down the Esplanade to see the incredible legacy of that government in co-operatives.

But, quite frankly, it was also our friend David Crombie, former Progressive Conservative, former mayor of Toronto, former Progressive Conservative cabinet minister, who was one of the authors of that legacy. The official opposition, the party opposite, shares in that legacy of activism for affordable and co-op housing. It would seem to me to be a bit of a shame if that's not continued.

Mr. Speaker, you've been very kind, because I've wandered so far off topic that it's not funny, but you've given me the same latitude as others, and I should probably come to the point at some point.

Making tenure dispute resolution for co-op residents more efficient, cost-effective and transparent is really the focus of this bill. It has been pointed out by others—I've never seen a piece of legislation try to get through this House so many times. I feel like we're rolling the rock up

the hill over and over again. I agree with people who have talked. I hope all parties are committed to getting this through the House.

This is just one of the basic, decent things that we do as MPPs to create some fairness, to create a situation in which people who are living together in co-ops can deal with disputes in a civilized and respectful way. It protects people's dignity. It removes litigation from the courts. If passed, Bill 14 would allow co-operative boards to apply to the Landlord and Tenant Board to resolve tenure disputes that are currently provided for under the Residential Tenancies Act. That seems to me to be such a simple and civil thing to do. Only parliamentary Legislatures could make it complicated, Mr. Speaker.

0940

It's interesting, too, because I think that tenure-based disputes based on the grounds not provided for in the RTA would finally continue to be handled through the internal democratic and co-op tenure disputes process, and then, only if necessary, and very rarely, would these ever be resolved in the courts.

I can't tell you, Mr. Speaker, in Toronto Centre, which I think has more co-ops than almost anywhere else—I think that my friend from Ottawa—Vanier would give me a run for my money on that, but there are certainly a few of us on this side of the House who are more than familiar with co-ops, who I think would say that our constituency offices have handled these kinds of concerns and have seen some really heartbreaking disputes, not just for individuals—because these kinds of things can create a great deal of tension in the co-operative housing community, make going home at night very uncomfortable, create divisions between neighbours. We have been promising for a long time to do something about it, and we have certainly on this side of the House tried very hard to get this bill through a number of times. I again want to thank our friends in the third party, in the New Democratic Party, for their continuing support for this. Hopefully, the official opposition will join in this effort.

We now have about 550 co-op providers. This is no small number of people. There are 44,000 co-op households now in Ontario. There are 125,000 people who live in co-ops. This is larger than a mid-sized city. The cost of the evictions is about \$3,000 to \$5,000. This is money that could be much better spent by co-ops in investing in facilities and upgrades, in maintaining the buildings and in subsidies, quite frankly, often where people pay higher rents in a co-op to cross-subsidize so that people of lesser means can live as part of that community. I don't think that any co-op likes to spend thousands of dollars on an eviction process. It's kind of contrary to the entire spirit of the place.

I'm hoping, as well, if there are suggestions or amendments from the opposition parties, that they'll be presented, that they'll move through that in an efficient way. I hope we don't have any cause to slow this down in any way.

Housing—and I can say this as the Minister of Infrastructure—is a critical part of our infrastructure. We own

a lot of land. We have a lot of abilities to create a tool kit and incentives to harvest some affordable housing through this amazing condo boom going on. Right now, in my constituency, there are 47 condo towers going up that haven't even broken ground out there. If you look at the electoral map for Toronto Centre, it is about one quarter of the geography that it currently is right now. When you realize that my constituency's footprint physically is going to be 25% after 2015 of what it is today, it tells you something. Right now, I think I have the second-largest population, after Helena Jaczek, my friend from Oak Ridges—Markham, or my friend from Vaughan. I'm approaching 200,000 constituents, and I think I have another 30,000 right now in the West Don Lands alone.

To the members opposite, many of you, I am gratefully humbled and honoured to be your MPP seasonally, and I hope you're satisfied with the service you're getting from your member. You are all my constituents. I feel that I actually have developed—

Interjections.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I run into the member for Chatham—Kent—Essex on most days, and shortly arrived on his doorstep canvassing, to meet his lovely wife, who was celebrating a very significant anniversary. I've gotten to know many of you by knocking on your doors, and I want to tell the members opposite who live in my constituency seasonally, though we're not of the same political stripe, you have always been very nice to me. A few of you have invited me in for coffee, which I'm sure is simply to keep me from knocking on more doors, but the coffee has always been quite tasty and lovely.

We have to do a lot more in affordable housing. I've always felt that this place is best when it's least partisan. I've always felt that most honourable members—and I'll go further: all honourable members—come here to make a difference.

When I lived through the AIDS epidemic—and I've said this many times in this House—the thing that marked my politics in my life more than anything else was celebrating my 30th birthday by going to a funeral for my 42nd friend who died in their twenties of AIDS. I don't think I would have run for office or done any of the things I've been able to do in my life—because I confronted my own mortality in my twenties. People who went off to war—when they talk about the great generation, it was a generation of men and women who confronted their mortalities at an extraordinarily early age and became one of the most creative generations, from whom we have inherited so much. The closest thing I've experienced—and I don't compare myself to that—is I discovered in my twenties that people die very quickly, our bodies are very fragile, and many of us live our lives into our fifties, sixties, and seventies and look back with great regret that we didn't do anything with our lives that we would have, could have, should have. I sort of promised myself and my friends that I lost that I wanted to make a difference in my life.

I think we can do so much more on housing than we are. I think this is an important piece. But we're the

wealthiest, healthiest, most tech-savvy generation in Canadian history. None of our parents or grandparents—and God knows, many of them came from countries with very little, came here with a shopping bag; or First Nations folks who grew up here in horrible residential schools in difficult situations. They left us a pretty incredible legacy.

I think it's time for us, on things like housing, to ask ourselves, why does every Ontarian not have a key to a safe place to live? Why is that not possible? Why can we not, as three political parties, as decent people who came here to make a difference, work in a less partisan way to accomplish more things? I think many of us would much rather go to the electorate in a few months or a couple of years saying that we have the best housing programs in the world.

I think we're doing some extraordinary things. You look at my friend Diane MacLean—because for some of us, our job is to criticize the government, but some of the things we've done—Diane MacLean just got the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal. This is a woman who got eight people together—there were nine of them; Regent Park was interested in co-ops. It was very hard to do co-ops because of land costs—and we need to look at how we make that easier again, because we need to be getting back to building them again. But she approached George Smitherman, the federal government and Pam McConnell and she started a conversation and went to some of the developers. That started in 2003. Within 24 months, the partnership between three governments and the communities and developers was building Regent Park, which, if you've been down there, isn't just amazing, affordable housing, it isn't just mixed income; there's an aquatic centre there which is being built between the city and the province which is remarkable. There's the Daniels Spectrum. They have more cultural and art groups—it's amazing to see the young people in Regent Park engaged in culture and jobs. We have businesses back in that community that are hiring people in that community. We're not just building housing; we're building a neighbourhood there.

The same thing is happening in my constituency in the West Don Lands. We have three major affordable housing projects going up right now on provincially owned land that had been sitting there. I'm very proud of that.

But beyond this bill, I'm hoping that one of the legacies of this session of the Legislature will be that we can actually use our infrastructure budgets, our land banks by community land banking, and we can actually bring forward a housing agenda collaboratively in this House. I have heard, from members on all sides, some very, very good ideas on these things. This simple dispute mechanism is such a simple thing to do. I always believe that you start with small things, you build some trust, you demonstrate that we can do things together by working and being honourable members first, and then take on some bigger things.

My biggest hope about this simple thing that we have been trying to do for so long—which will make so many

people's lives easier, will liberate thousands of dollars in co-ops that will make a difference in some children's lives and some seniors' lives, and someone with a disability may get a ramp now built in their co-op rather than it going into an eviction process. These simple, decent things can make a huge difference. Maybe let's just try to make this bill get through this House faster than any other piece of legislation. God knows, we owe it to the patient people who live in co-ops who have been waiting so long for this.

0950

Mr. John Yakabuski: Maybe you shouldn't have stalled it so far.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I can see that some of the members opposite lost the spirit of Christmas and Valentine's Day very quickly. Maybe, Mr. Speaker, 106 of 107 of us can work together collaboratively on this. I have hope for my friend from—oops, I'm not that good yet at this—Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke. I'll buy him a beer sometime over in the neighbourhood and we'll become friends.

But I hope, Mr. Speaker, that this actually leads us to take on a larger project together and that many of us can reach out within our own caucuses and across the aisle to try and look at what are some of the next things that we could do. How do we start to kick-start co-op housing when the land thresholds are that? How do we actually start to create some opportunities to take this condo boom and make one of the legacies of this condo boom in my constituency and many others—and I've heard some very good ideas on that in this House—the creation of some affordable housing? How do we actually start to engage the federal government not to walk away from its commitments to federally established co-ops and keep that money so we don't lose that affordable housing?

If all of us work together on that, if we don't have a confrontational approach to the federal government but just simply say, "We're keeping our commitment with provincial co-ops; the provincial government is maintaining its commitment"—a simple resolution in this House wouldn't cost us any money, Mr. Speaker, asking the federal government. All of us have our sister parties in that federal House. This is an immediate thing where we could save thousands of affordable housing units if we could all cherish a legacy that is, quite frankly, in this province, a legacy of all three parties—everyone. There have been Liberals, Conservatives, New Democrats at every order of government who helped build that legacy, and it is very much in jeopardy right now in Ontario if the federal government does not continue—simply continue—its existing commitment to co-ops.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Slam the feds.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Well, 106 to one, Speaker; that's the way I look at it.

It's not slamming the feds; it's actually us working very hard to maintain our contribution and simply asking the federal government to do that.

Mr. Speaker, I used to live in another province. I saw the highway sharing on the Prairies, the matching dollars

that still go on. I know there's a floodway being built in Winnipeg where \$1 out of \$4 comes out of this province's tax base in federal transfers. We export \$22 billion. Having lived outside of Ontario, I used to always end my speeches as mayor of Winnipeg thanking Ontarians for being a foundation for the rest of this country. I don't think we ever need to apologize as Ontarians for the role—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you, Minister.

Questions and comments?

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: The minister alluded to my earlier comment about always blaming the feds. Just for the record, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that we've noticed from this government is that they repeatedly always seem to blame our federal counterparts for their shortcomings.

Obviously, we have a vested interest in ensuring that all Ontarians are included and brought in and that they have a proper home that they can call their own, and function and provide the dignities that a family deserves here in this great province. But the debt load that this government has brought upon the province of Ontario—when we're paying \$10 billion annually just in interest payments, imagine what that \$10 billion can do for low-income housing in this province. This government has denied future generations the proper dignity that they're going to need not only in getting a job but also finding a house, even if you are working.

When I hear the Liberals across the way—the minister—say it's the federal government's fault, we've heard this before. They repeatedly do this over and over again. They are not accountable for their actions, Mr. Speaker. That's one of the reasons why I'm here today. The minister discussed, absolutely incorrectly—I believe that all members here, regardless of political party, are here to make an improvement in the lives of Ontarians. That's why I'm here, Mr. Speaker, because I truly believe that what this government has done is taking us down the wrong path.

We can ensure all Ontarians have a great future.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jonah Schein: I'm happy to join the debate this morning. First up, let me just say that of course you can count on my support, on our party's support, for co-operative housing. That's where we've always stood on this issue.

The Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation referenced the Esplanade, the co-operative housing down at Parliament. In fact, that's close to my home. My mom lives in that co-operative housing. She's a person over 65 years old. She's still working. She has worked her entire life, but like many people who are aging in our province, she does not have much of a pension. The fact that she has stable housing is a relief to me and to my family and to her. She's a very active participant in that co-op, and I think they're lucky to have her there as well.

Speaker, today we stand in a province, in the GTHA, where almost half of workers don't have stable work.

They don't know if they're going to get paid next week or next month, and they can't count on any kind of benefits, on any kind of pension. That means that we have to create affordable housing.

We need to have a government that actually stands up and takes responsibility on this issue. While my colleague across the way speaks about friendship and so forth—and I appreciate that; I believe we should have a collegial Parliament—I also believe that we actually need to take responsibility for this issue. This government has been in power, by my count now, almost 10 years. So to continue to pass the buck to others does not actually feel respectful to the people who are looking for affordable housing in this city. There are people who won't go into shelters because our shelter system is so broken and because there are no affordable housing options.

Going back to federal Minister Martin, in history, is not acceptable either. If we look at the Liberal government federally under Martin, we delivered the biggest tax cuts, the biggest spending cuts, we've ever seen in this country. I'd like this government to stand up today and actually close the corporate loopholes that we're asking for. Put that in this budget bill and put that money toward affordable housing, and I hope that I can count on my friend across the way to come through on that issue.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments? The minister responsible for seniors.

Hon. Mario Sergio: Speaker, it's good to see you in the chair again.

I'm very pleased that the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing has introduced this particular bill which we are debating today. I have been listening very attentively to the remarks by Minister Murray as well as the member from Parkdale—High Park.

I have to say—and we have to give credit where credit's due—that the bill wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for the consistent and persistent efforts of the wonderful people representing the co-ops: Harvey Cooper and Dale Reagan. They are in the audience here today, Speaker, so I want to acknowledge their presence and their continuous knocking that this is an important thing to do.

We have 125,000 people living in co-ops, Speaker, and they have a few problems. In order to solve some of those problems, they have been asking the government to do something, and that's why we are here today. I totally agree with the member from Parkdale—High Park to move it ahead and get on with it. Let's approve it and do the right thing for the co-op people in Ontario.

The bill, as it is, aims to do a couple of things. There are three sections: one, it amends the Co-operative Corporations Act; the second part is, it's amending the Residential Tenancies Act; and the third section contains consequential amendments to the other acts affected by the proposed changes.

Speaker, this has been a long time coming. I have dealt myself with these issues I forget how many times. We all say it's got to be done. It's the right thing to do. I think we owe it to the co-op people of Ontario. This is

one way of moving it forward, so let's go ahead and do it, Speaker. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's a privilege for me to stand and talk with regard to Bill 14. I appreciate the comments from my colleague on the government side, and the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation as well.

We do have a housing problem here in Ontario, especially for low-income tenants. I was privileged for 25 years to have sat on the board of directors for a seniors' complex back in the riding of Chatham-Kent-Essex, working with those people. We know some of the issues and challenges that they're faced with on a daily basis at times.

A couple of things: This act, Speaker, as we know, streamlines the internal dispute resolution process to non-profit co-ops that clarify that hearings before the LTB and the courts are determined based on the merits of the case.

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As we all know, Speaker, there are 125,000 Ontarians who live in the province's 550 non-profit housing co-ops. One of the things that this particular bill does is it waives that \$45 filing fee for low income. Of course, one of the things that I'm concerned about is that that \$45, as you multiply that out, may be borne by taxpayers along the way.

One of the other things that could also be a concern is the fact that this bill, Speaker, should have been passed in our last session. However, it was delayed because of former Premier McGuinty's prorogation. This should already be law.

We will support this particular bill in second reading. But what we really would like to do is to push for province-wide hearings on the amendments to the LTB so that the landlord and tenant advocates can flood the committee with recommendations.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation has two minutes.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I won't go through them all, because there were many of them, but I want to thank all the honourable members for their very positive comments.

The member for Davenport raised, I think, a very important issue. This is part of the challenge we have on this side of the House. Your friends to your immediate right will point out that we do not have the lowest taxes in Canada, and they're right. But we have very competitive taxes.

In your value system, from my perspective, is: What's the overall quality of life? I don't mind paying my fair share, because I came from a family—my grandmother had nine kids and lived in a two-bedroom cold-water flat, and, quite frankly, no one should ever have to live like that. That was a time before we had medicare and before we had bigger government, and bigger government has meant that my 85-year-old mother lives securely and safely. I support her, as my friend from Parkdale said. It should also be pointed out that we have the lowest per

capita spending of any province, which, my friend from Parkdale—High Park pointed out, also has consequences. So we have some tough choices to make here, and they're not always easy, because, as my friend from Davenport pointed out, we tried some things, and we should reach out across the aisle.

We tried the 2% surcharge on people over \$500,000. The challenge we have is that tax money is very mobile and corporate taxes are very mobile. There is \$38 billion stranded offshore in the United States. That tax may not generate much new revenue. As a matter of fact, over time, we could lose revenue. So we have to be a little more sophisticated in this world. It's not simply a matter of cutting or raising taxes; that isn't synonymous anymore with growing or reducing revenues or costs.

So I'm hoping that we can have a fact-based government and elevate this discussion to some evidence-based approaches to these problems. These are not simple challenges; they are very complicated.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's a pleasure to join the debate on Bill 14 this morning—the reincarnation of Bill 65. I do want to welcome Harvey Cooper and other representatives from the co-op housing sector here this morning. I know he was welcomed by the minister responsible for seniors as well, but I think—and I'm not trying to speak for Harvey—he probably believes he has been here too often because, do you know what? We could have had this taken care of, Harvey. Bill 65 was introduced on April 12, 2012.

The member for Thunder Bay—Atikokan made excuses for the prorogation when he was speaking earlier, saying, "We really couldn't have got it through." Hold on a minute, Speaker. We're not completely paralyzed here yet, are we? April 12 was the introduction of that bill, I say to the member—April 12, 2012. This House never rose for the summer till the end of June. It never was called for debate once, until October 2, 2012.

I think Harvey would have liked to probably have visited this place sometime in April or May 2012 and maybe had Bill 65 debated on. Maybe we'd have passed the darn thing before Dalton McGuinty took a walk in the snow, as they say. Of course, there was no snow on October 15, but he was certainly thinking about winter—the winter of our discontent, when all of you folks were out farmed across the province, trying to prove to the people that you were the right one to choose by a few members of the Liberal Party to be the next Premier of Ontario.

I think that when the Liberals get up—and they opened the door; they opened the door to the prorogation discussion. Good Lord, I detect a guilty conscience—

Mr. Grant Crack: Did you ever prorogue?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I detect a guilty conscience, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell was already asked once. Last chance.

Continue.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Speaker, you know it's hard enough for me to keep my train of thought without the interruptions.

I detect a guilty conscience over there. Every time a Liberal gets up to speak, they want to talk about how the prorogation really didn't amount to anything. Well, then stop talking about it. Stop talking about it. Let's get on with the business here. It was wrong. You did it for all the wrong reasons. Dalton McGuinty did it because he didn't want to have any more focus on the scandals that your government has brought on. He didn't want to talk about power plants, he didn't want to talk about Ornge, so he prorogued the House. I understand, but we've got a bill to debate in the House this morning, and they should stop talking about prorogation. They did it. It was their sin. We'll deal with it at a later date.

What I detect here this morning though, too, is that nobody is talking about co-op housing. They're talking about affordable housing. They've taken the debate into their own little areas, so I suspect, then, you're giving a fair bit of latitude on the debate this morning of which I may take advantage, and I may just speak right to the point—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Only if I let you.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I understand, Speaker. I may attempt to take advantage of that, and if you allow me, I will be grateful forever and ever. I'm not sure I'm offering to buy you that beer that the minister offered me, but I will be grateful forever and ever.

I want to talk a little bit about housing in general. The Attorney General said earlier that housing is a basic right, and he's correct. Good Lord, in a country as rich as Canada, in a province as rich as Ontario—getting poorer under this government, I might point out, but still a great province in Canada, the province of opportunity, the province that, historically, everyone looked to as the leader—housing is a basic right, and everyone should expect to have adequate housing.

Having said that, I think that we will always have homelessness, because there are other reasons—sometimes it's mental illness and other challenges. We'll always be having to deal with that, but we also have to have the systems and assistance in place to try to help people who find themselves in that category, as well.

The minister talked about his mother. I'll talk about my mother-in-law a little bit. She lives in a rental unit in Eganville, 89 Bruce Street—hardest-working person I've ever known. She's going to be 80 this year. It's only a couple of years ago that she quit cleaning other people's homes to make a little extra money. She has no income other than what she gets from the government. Her husband has been dead a long time. She never worked out of the home. She came from Germany in 1954 with my wife as her young daughter, and has just struggled through her entire life, but she never complains. She just puts her shoulder to the wheel and keeps working and doing whatever she can to help others. That's the kind of woman Elma Smith, my mother-in-law, is. She struggles

and she struggles, but I am extremely proud of how she has faced the challenges that she has in life. She won't be happy that I mentioned her in debate today, but I feel compelled that I must.

Our expectations in housing have changed so much over the years—our expectations of society. You know, when I was growing up, when I was a young boy—today, our kids all have always had their own rooms—I didn't have my own room. I shared a room, not with one, not with two, not with three, not with four, but five other brothers. I shared a room with five other brothers—

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Good night, John-Boy.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Yes, good night, John. It was like the Waltons.

But I'm one of 10 boys. I live in the same house that we grew up in—we're a much smaller family today than I grew up in, a much smaller family today—but it's just life's expectations. People expect more and more today. I'm just pointing that out to my own children, I think.

1010

Let's talk about the bill here—but you know, I don't have any complaints, because you always had somebody to talk to in that room with five other brothers. It was never a lonely time falling asleep, you know? And presumably, I didn't snore when I was that young, so I didn't bother everybody else.

Let's get to the bill, Bill 14. I think that's the matter at hand today. Basically, as I see it—and I want to thank my colleague Steve Clark, our critic for municipal affairs and housing, a great member from the great riding of Leeds-Grenville, where my great friend Bob Runciman hailed from before him. I want to congratulate Steve on the tremendous work he has done on behalf of our caucus on this file. I know how closely he has worked with Harvey Cooper and his people as well.

As I understand it—and I'm not, obviously, as well versed on this bill as my colleague might be. But one of the essential components of the act is to allow—when there are disputes between the operators of co-op housing and tenants in co-op housing, they can now go to the Landlord and Tenant Board to settle the dispute as opposed to going to the courts. I share the Attorney General's view that the courts are not the place to settle disputes such as that.

We have essentially supported the bill, Mr. Speaker. We committed to supporting Bill 65 on second reading in the House whenever the government finally got around to bringing that to second reading—but I'm not talking about the prorogation; they keep talking about it. So we bring the bill back—it's now Bill 14—and we're debating this bill. That is the right thing to do, to allow the Landlord and Tenant Board to deal with those disputes.

We do have situations, and it's not an either/or. When you have disputes, it means there are two parties that can't agree. Sometimes one is completely wrong and sometimes the other is completely wrong, but most times there's a little bit of a shared responsibility. It's just like a discussion or an argument with someone else. I say "discussions." When I have a discussion with my wife,

usually I am entirely wrong. Then there are some other people who have discussions with their wife, and they might share some of the responsibility. In my case, it's usually me all the way.

But I want to talk about my wife. My wife is a real estate agent. She has had many situations when she has been charged with the sale of someone's home, and those people have a tenant; and they did a very poor job, maybe, of assessing—what's the word?—evaluating, getting the background on that tenant before they signed the dotted line on the lease. Folks, that is like pulling hen's teeth when you get one of those tenants, and they know they got you, and they ain't leaving.

She has had situations where she has got the house for sale—I'll tell you about one. I say this to the Attorney General. She has got the house for sale, and these people really want to sell because they're older. They want to rid themselves of the asset. So she goes and makes the appointment. You have to call the tenants and make the arrangements, so she calls the tenants and makes the arrangements. See, the tenants don't want the house to be sold because they are not paying the rent and they're behind on hydro, but they don't want to get out. It's like trying to pull a stump that has been cemented in out of the ground when you're trying to pull them out of there.

She gets there for the real estate appointment. Well, they've got about 12 friends there. They're all drinking beer, smoking dope. The lady walks in to buy the house—they turned around and walked out. There's no way in hell they wanted to buy the house at that point. Mission accomplished on the part of that particular tenant.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Is this up at Barry's Bay?

Mr. John Yakabuski: No, I cannot reveal that. I say that to the member for Peterborough and the Minister of Rural Affairs.

Those are just some of the things that happen in the real world. In the theoretical world of lovey-dovey politics, everybody gets along. But in the real world, there are some real challenges.

In general, as I said, we're supporting the bill. But I do want to ask why they brought in this provision of waiving the fee of \$45 to apply to—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I thank the member.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It being that magical time of 10:15, the member will resume when we start again on this debate on this bill. He'll be—

Mr. John Yakabuski: I could be dead by then.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): You could be.

This House stands recessed until 10:30 this morning.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise today to recognize a number of people who are here from the

great riding of Oxford. To make sure that I listened to you last time, Mr. Speaker: They're here in the members' gallery.

I will go through the names: Deb Tait; Wayne Walden; Monika Rauch; Suzanne Crellin; Heather Gingerich; Reid Elliott; Judah Gingerich; and Robbie Gibson.

They're here as part of a group concerned about a proposed landfill in Oxford. I want to commend them for their work and for bringing forward their concerns, and I want to welcome them to Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I appreciate the member from Oxford's introduction.

Introduction of guests?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I am delighted today to introduce members of the Association of Ontario Midwives. They're here for their Queen's Park day. Lisa Weston, Kelly Stadelbauer, Juana Berinstein and Allyson Booth are all here today. Allyson Booth is a special midwife because she helped catch my grandson Pax.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Thank you, Speaker. Please help me welcome James Jonker to the visitors' gallery. He's here to watch his son A.J. perform his duties as a page. Welcome.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I am pleased to welcome to the west visitors' gallery this morning Moreen Miller, the CEO of the Ontario Stone, Sand and Gravel Association; and also two members of OSSGA: Craig Copping of Rankin Construction and Marlene Yakabuski of Bot Construction, who is also my sister.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I am pleased today to introduce my friends who are here from Belmore, Ontario: Kevin and Marilyn Ashley.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's my pleasure to welcome to the Legislative Assembly today Mr. Steve Baker, president of Union Gas, and Mel Ydreos, all from the great riding of Chatham-Kent-Essex and who, by the way, gave a very compelling presentation of natural gas to our PC caucus this morning.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I promise not to say anything about gas and the PC caucus.

Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to indicate to the House that joining us will be the 9th Pickering Scouts, who were at the launch of the second round of the Great Lakes Guardian Community grant program this morning. The Scouts have been actively involved in teaching youth appreciation and the need for environmental stewardship, along with cleaning up garbage from streams and marshes, and encouraging the use of freshwater resources for recreation so youth can appreciate the value and need to preserve our Great Lakes.

Welcome to the 9th Pickering Scouts.

Hon. David Zimmer: I'd like to recognize the presence of some visitors from my riding of Willowdale. Stephanie Tom is going to be a page captain this week, and her family is visiting to wish her well. Joining us are Jack and May Tom, Stephanie's grandparents; Julie and Christopher Tom, Stephanie's parents; and Stephanie's sisters, Katherine and Evelyn Tom. Welcome to Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Just before we move into question period, I will offer a gentle reminder. I'm not upset about it, but I would ask you to get to your introductions and leave the editorials aside, as it creates discourse with statements and all of those other rules that do apply. I would ask for everyone's indulgence, to allow me to not be seen as picking on the member from Oxford. It is actually convention for us just to do the introductions, and I'd appreciate it if we stuck to that as best we could.

It is now time for question period.

ORAL QUESTIONS

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Victor Fedeli: My question is for the Premier. Your government said it would cost \$180 million to cancel the Mississauga gas plant. Then you added \$10 million in financing; it's now \$190 million. That's your number; it has been in the papers a hundred times.

But I have new documents here, Speaker, that show a "side deal" which provided an additional \$5 million "above the amount of \$10 million."

The cost is more than \$190 million but, Premier, you already knew that. In the 600 just-released documents, there is proof that cabinet had this back in 2011, yet you stood here in 2012 and said, "You have all the documents," knowing full well that we did not have this document at that time.

Premier, will you admit that you said one thing but knew the absolute opposite to be true?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: The opposition are trying to count the number of angels on the head of a pin.

We have a committee that is looking into this. The Premier has indicated that she's willing to go and be a witness at committee, where they can produce documents, where they can put them in front of witnesses, so they can answer the questions in a credible manner.

The Premier has been outstanding in her clarity, in her transparency, in opening up the process. We have nothing to apologize for. We look forward in every way possible to answering these questions in a professional manner, with the proper documents in front of us, instead of somebody waving a piece of paper in question period and expecting any credible answer to come out of that—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order, please. Thank you.

Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: The page that I'm referring to was in the secret documents that were released in the fourth document dump.

Premier, in July 2011, a cabinet minute on Project Vapour, your government's code name for the Oakville

gas plant cancellation, was circulated. You were a member of cabinet at that time. But on September 25, 2012, you stood in this House and stated that "all of the documents that have been released ... are the ones that were asked for."

Premier, you said that, but you knew full well at that time that all of the documents were not released. So I ask you today, do you stand by your statement in the House at that time, or will you stand today and apologize to the members of this House and the people of Ontario?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: All parties asked for the relocation of the Mississauga gas plant. That's on record. What also is on record is that this government won power again, and we fulfilled our commitment and our promise and we relocated it.

We then asked the Ontario Power Authority to provide us with the cost of relocating the power plant in Mississauga. They provided us with that information; we made that information public.

I want to add again that we were transparent and forthright in asking the chair and the CEO of OPA to come here and answer questions before the media for an hour. They said clearly and precisely that the release of documents was a decision of the OPA, and that they made it of their own will, of their own volition, without interference. It was clear there's absolutely no contempt, and there's absolute transparency from this side of the House.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Premier, this newly released material, the 600 secret pages presented today, prove that you and your members did indeed know we did not have all of the documents. Yet one by one, they stood here and said something opposite to that fact.

The member from Sudbury said, "All the documents associated to those gas plants were released."

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The member from Guelph said, "The minister has in fact tabled all the documents." These are members of cabinet who had the secret document. The member from Peterborough said, "All the documents that have been requested have certainly been delivered"—even though this new document proves, new information proves, they knew.

The list is very, very long, Premier, of your members who stood up. If you won't apologize, will you at least ask your members to?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: The opposition continues to ask questions, trying to parse and analyze what has happened. It's very, very clear what happened, Mr. Speaker. It's extremely clear what—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, come to order. The member from Leeds-Grenville, come to order.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: I want to again refer to the CEO of the Ontario Power Authority. The question that was asked to him was, "At any point during these searches"

for documents “—we are talking about all of them, not just this one—did you feel you were under a great deal of political pressure to either produce or not produce records?” The answer was a clear no.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, the question to Colin Andersen, “Are you sure you were not under any pressure from the government to delay telling when you had those documents? Why that time?” The answer was, “Government had no involvement in regard to the timing of our disclosure. It was totally our decision.” The information is very clear.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Todd Smith: My question is for the Deputy Premier this morning. We know that in July 2011, cabinet was aware of the existence of Project Vapour. That's your government's code name for the Oakville gas plant cancellation. You were in cabinet at that time. But on October 2 of last year, you stood in the House and stated, “The Minister of Energy has complied with the request to release the documents.”

You knew of the existence of Project Vapour more than a year earlier, and you also knew that none of the Project Vapour documents were released by the government initially. So what I want to know and what the people of Ontario want to know is, do you stand by your statement of October 2, or do you believe that it's not part of your job to read confidential cabinet emails?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Lanark will withdraw.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I withdraw.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, yesterday, you provided a ruling to this House on the very issue of statements that were made by members of this Legislature about the issue of documents during the debate and question period during that period, and I congratulate you on your ruling.

But I think there is a bigger issue at play here, and that is that the justice committee has begun its work. I confess that I slipped out of the House yesterday during my House duty to watch it on TV, and I'm not sure if all members are aware of this—I could not believe my eyes. The government brought forward a motion at that committee to offer all government documents on the power plants. They brought it forward. Mr. Speaker, do you know what PCs and the NDP did? They joined together to vote against it, Mr. Speaker. They put their hands up unanimously to vote against it, that they didn't want this—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Nepean–Carleton will come to order.

Supplementary?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): First of all, I'm standing. Second of all, I've asked you to stop. Third, when I do get the quiet, people start up again. I'm going to remind you that I'm not going to tolerate that, because the only way in which we can make this thing work is you.

Supplementary?

Mr. Todd Smith: That was the motion that the member is referring to that was ruled out of order by the Clerk, I'm assuming; right.

My question is back to the Deputy Premier. Cabinet knew and was briefed on Project Vapour. That means you knew what it was, and you were briefed on it as well. You knew during debate on the contempt motion last October that no Project Vapour documents had been released, but that didn't stop you from saying, “The documents have been tabled. That work has been done.”

Minister, I'm going to give you a chance here. You've known at least since the second batch of documents were released on October 12 that you made an incorrect statement to the House on October 2. Will you stand and correct your record and apologize to the people of Ontario?

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I think if anyone needs to correct their record, it's the honourable member who just stood up and talked about what happened at the committee yesterday. A motion went forward to the committee, put forward by government members, to produce all documents on the gas plant issue held by the government of Ontario. I watched on television as members of the Progressive Conservative Party and members of the New Democratic Party voted against that. I was going to call Legislative Assembly television to say, “There's something wrong with my television; the opposition will not take yes for an answer and they would not vote for it.”

They talk about how they want to get to the truth, but it's all just talk. When we have offered them, over and over again, initiatives for them to allow to look into this matter, they have repeatedly turned them down, Mr. Speaker. I think they have some explaining to do.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Todd Smith: The political games are continuing. Every time I turned on my TV yesterday, there was no committee on there because the government continued to recess time after time after time. Political games are continuing on that side of the House, Mr. Speaker.

My question is back to the Deputy Premier. You were a senior official on the last Liberal campaign. You've been a senior cabinet minister for both the old Premier and the current one. You were involved in briefings to cabinet and minutes distributed by the secretary of cabinet about Project Vapour. If anybody knew about Project Vapour, it had to be you. Yet for months, you've risen in the House day after day. You've refused to correct your record about statements that were incorrect.

Why don't you folks do the honourable thing? You know you were saying incorrect statements in the House; stand up and correct your record, like the House leader did.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, let's review. First, the member from Cambridge tells us that a public inquiry would be too expensive. Then the member from Nipissing holds a press conference asking for a public inquiry. Then we offer the opposition a select committee, and the opposition says no; they want to go on a mean-spirited, vindictive witch hunt against the former Minister of Energy. Then we come forward and offer to broaden the mandate of the committee, Mr. Speaker, and it takes them a week to get back to us. Then the government yesterday puts forward a motion at the committee offering to produce every government document on the gas plant, and they, to my astonishment and the astonishment of everyone watching, vote against it.

HEALTH CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la première ministre. Speaker, I am hopeful that the government will take the good advice of the New Democrats and introduce my private member's bill, the Skin Cancer Prevention Act, to finally protect our youth from cancer by banning the use of tanning beds for minors. It would be a good thing to do—a good small step but an important one.

As the Premier knows, though, there are more than 6,000 people waiting for home care, and sometimes, the waits stretch for over 260 days. Will the Premier take action on a five-day home care guarantee?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think the member opposite knows that we are very keen to work with her on the issue around tanning beds and cancer prevention initiatives, Mr. Speaker. I know that the Minister of Health and she have been talking, and I am very much looking forward to us being able to find common cause on this. Again, I think this is one of these issues that really is not partisan. I think that there is lots of evidence that demonstrates that this is a direction that we should be going. So, as I say, we very much look forward to working with her on this legislation.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I tend to agree with what the Premier has said: that banning tanning for youth is not partisan. It's actually a no-brainer. If you ask any of those youth in the gallery, they will tell you that it's the right thing to do.

Bringing a guarantee of five days for home care is also a no-brainer. We know that there is work to do in home care, but we would like a simple commitment. We would like this Premier to commit to a five-day guarantee so that people don't have to wait. Is the Premier willing to do that?

1050

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: This is an issue that the member opposite also mentioned in her first question.

Mr. Speaker, it's again another area that we have been, I have been, the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care has been very clear on: that as we transform our health care system, one of the foundational pieces of that transformation is making sure that people get the health care that they need, where they need it and in a timely way. Moving those services out of acute care hospitals into homes, into the community, is a fundamental part of what we need to do in order to make the health care system sustainable.

We know that there is more to do, Mr. Speaker. We have spent millions of dollars and have provided millions of hours more of home care. We know there's more to do, and I think it's, again, an area that we can work together on.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

M^{me} France Gélinas: For the thousands and thousands of Ontarians who are waiting for home care right now, they would like to see real results. They would like to see improvements to our broken home care system, and they would like to see improvement in their own lives.

The government seems willing to move ahead with some proposals but unwilling to do things such as capping CEOs' salaries, and you seem unwilling to implement the five-day guarantee for home care. People want to go beyond working together to actually getting results, and the way that they describe results to us is getting a five-day guarantee for home care services.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Again, I am delighted that the NDP is focusing on the need to enhance home care, because we are in complete agreement with that.

We are making progress, Speaker. We do measure wait times, and what we're saying is that now 90% of people who are referred to home care from hospital upon discharge are waiting less than seven days, so we're getting close to the five-day wait there. If referred when they're already in the community, that wait is nine days, but it was 13 days, so we have gone from 13 days to nine days.

We are making additional investments in home care because we do want people to get the home care they need so they can stay home safely, so that they do not need to go to hospital unnecessarily and they can be discharged from hospital when they're ready.

PROROGATION

Ms. Catherine Fife: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. Would the Premier agree that the decision last fall to shut down the Legislature was a mistake that shouldn't be repeated?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I have been quite clear that my predecessor made the decision that he believed he needed to make in order to be able to give an opportunity for a leadership in order for us to be able to

work with our broader public sector partners and to come to some agreements. All of that happened, Mr. Speaker.

I was committed to bringing the Legislature back as quickly as possible on the legislative calendar. There were many who said it couldn't be done, but we did it. We were back on February 19. We're here, and the work of the people of Ontario is going on.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Premier, people are getting cynical about politics, and we owe it to them to do better.

Last fall, the government made a desperate attempt to win majority power in a by-election. They used divisive tactics that created chaos in our schools. When all of those games failed to deliver a win, they shut the doors to the Legislature to avoid any sort of accountability.

Does the Premier understand that this is exactly what is making people cynical about politics in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know the member opposite is very genuine in her desire to have real engagement in politics and for people to feel optimistic and hopeful about their politicians. I know the member opposite, and I know that that is her desire. Mr. Speaker, I feel exactly the same way.

I made a commitment that we would bring the Legislature back as quickly as possible, Mr. Speaker. We did. Every party in this Legislature has used the rules of prorogation at one time or another, has made decisions on legislative procedure, has made those decisions in the context that that is the parliamentary history and the existing rules.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that what is most important is that we make our interactions real, that we make sure that we reflect the needs and the desires of the people of Ontario and that, to the very best of all of our abilities, we allow the business of the people of the province to go ahead so that people get the services that they need in this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Premier, I had the honour of being elected in that by-election, and 11 days after I arrived here in this House, the Legislature was shut down. I don't think that's acceptable, and the people who sent me here don't think it's acceptable either.

Tomorrow, we'll be debating a bill that would stop the partisan use of prorogation in the future. Can I count on the Premier's support?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I welcome the discussion that's going to happen in the Legislature tomorrow. I think some of the most interesting discussion in this place happens in private members' bills, because there are issues that come forward that reflect some very specific opinions and desires of people in the province. I look forward to hearing the debate in the Legislature. I don't think that there is any rule, any process or any tradition that can't be questioned and discussed. I think it is a very worthy subject that the member opposite is bringing

forward, and, as I say, I will be listening very carefully to the debate.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Rod Jackson: My question is not for the House leader; it's actually for the Minister of Finance. Since the minister was a key beneficiary of the billion-dollar gas plant scandal, I'm hoping I can derive some insight from him directly about the gas plant cancellations.

Last fall, he stood before this House to tell us about the documents. Apparently, and I quote you from Hansard, Minister, "The government put each and every document on a USB key," and, I quote from Hansard, "The request of the committee for these documents has been satisfied."

Finally, in Hansard again, he assured us, before three reluctant document dumps, that the energy minister "has complied with the committee's request and the ruling of the Speaker."

Minister, you knew full well at the time that none of the Project Vapour documents were among those that had been released by the government prior. Luckily, credibility didn't factor into your recent promotion. Minister, do you think it's time to correct the record and apologize to the people who voted for you and to the people of Ontario about the gas plant cancellations?

Hon. Charles Sousa: This is what I do know: I know I fought for my community before I was even elected. I fought for my community when I sat in the rump. I asked for support from the Conservatives and the NDP to support the issue, and I continue to do so. I fought for my community. I will continue to fight for all of Ontario on this issue—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew, come to order.

Hon. Charles Sousa: —and I don't apologize for that. I did the right thing—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order, please. The member from Renfrew will come to order.

Supplementary?

Mr. Rod Jackson: The McGuinty-Wynne campaign team did not believe the minister could retain his seat on his own in the last election, obviously, so as a reward, they infused his campaign efforts with at least \$190 million in tax dollars by cancelling the Mississauga gas plant. Then he had the gall to stand before the House last fall, trying to convince anyone who would listen that his government was complying with committee requests for the information. Instead, this was followed by one document dump after another document dump after another, confirming that the minister was one of the key beneficiaries of the gas plant cancellations. This minister was then boosted to treasurer of Ontario, despite the lack of confidence in his credibility in winning fairly in his own riding.

Minister, will you correct the record today, do the right thing and the honourable thing, and apologize to the

hard-working families of Ontario who ensured you have a job here today?

Hon. Charles Sousa: To the House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I am very, very happy—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Kitchener-Conestoga, come to order. The member from Lanark, come to order. Anyone else?

Carry on.

Hon. John Milloy: I'm very happy to talk about what went on in Mississauga South, and here's an oldie but a goldie: "Hi there. This is Geoff Janoscik, your Mississauga South Ontario PC candidate. I'm calling about the McGuinty-Sousa power plant that the Liberal government decided to build in your backyard. I'm against this power plant, and as your MPP, I will fight to stop the power plant from being built.... Our team has been out knocking on doors every single evening for several months, talking about the power plant and making sure that we defeat the Liberals in this riding and put an end to their bad decisions. On October 6, choose change that puts our community first."

All parties of this House were opposed to it. My question to the PCs is, when are they going to let their documents and their—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

New question.

1100

CASINOS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question to the Premier: MGM Resorts has retained Metrolinx head Robert Prichard as lobbyist for their proposed casino. One of the pressing issues for the casino at Exhibition Place is gridlock, yet the chair of the very organization that is in charge of finding the solution, the chair that the Liberal government appointed, is a lobbyist for a casino in Toronto.

Is the Premier comfortable with a Liberal appointee lobbying for a casino over the objections of the people of Toronto?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Interjections.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I have lots of time.

Interjections.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker?

Interjection.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Okay. Mr. Prichard has done the right thing. He is—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock.

It's kind of disappointing on both sides. The nuances of this place require me to have quick conversations. I

would recommend to everybody that we allow that to happen, and at the same time, when somebody is seeking to have quiet, that you don't amplify.

Carry on.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You asked us to take a race to the top; I don't think that's happening today.

Mr. Prichard has done the right thing. He properly sought the advice of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner, which is what all of us should do in those situations. He did that of his own volition. I am confident that the chair of the board will follow the rules and continue to take the advice of the commissioner going forward. The commissioner has provided excellent advice.

The decision we should be discussing right now, quite frankly, is the important conversations that Metrolinx is trying to have with the public and is having very successfully.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. John Tory called 2013 a turning point for transit investment in the region. He is on board with the Big Move and the need to make smart transit investments for the future.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, I'm going to go back to the Premier; the question was for her.

Torontonians are turning up by the thousands to make it clear they don't want a casino. Yet this government is ignoring the voice of the people whose communities will be affected.

Torontonians can see the government's utter disregard for the wishes of the community, but that's the case across Ontario, from Hamilton to Kingston.

Will the Premier be listening more closely to Liberal insiders or will she be allowing municipalities to decide this issue through referendums in the next round of municipal elections? Whose voice will she listen to?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, this government is unmatched in the history of this province in respect for municipal government. We are uploading services. We have turned over to municipal councils the proper authority to go with their responsibility. We gave the city of Toronto the City of Toronto Act, which is the most progressive piece of municipal legislation in North America. The city of Toronto has more taxing and control over its spending authority than any other municipal government in North America. It is the envy of everything.

Our Premier rightly has stood up and said that she will respect, as will this government, the decisions of the city of Toronto and other municipalities regarding casinos. I meet with my city councillors—Councillor McConnell, Councillor Wong-Tam and others—who think that we are showing the proper respect for the city, and they're thankful for it. Since some of them are members of his party, maybe he should talk to them.

ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

Mr. Phil McNeely: This question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Food. Minister, last summer, farmers across the province experienced dry, hot weather for

extended periods, which impacted their crops. This in turn affected the growth and availability of livestock forages.

In response to this, the government worked with farmers to assess the damage and initiated an Agri-Recovery file with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada—which, as you know, is a responsive program under the Growing Forward sweep of the national Business Risk Management program.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister: Can you please provide the House with an update on the Agri-Recovery file?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I want to thank the member for this question—thank you very much.

I just want to take a moment to explain how the program works. The AgriRecovery program, Mr. Speaker, is triggered by provincial requests, not federal. That's how the program is designed nationally. It was my colleague, the former Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, who requested an assessment under the Agri-Recovery program in July of last year. That led to a federal-provincial task team being struck to work on assessing damage done by the drought and related impacts on Ontario livestock producers.

While that assessment was under way, the provincial and federal governments agreed to jointly provide immediate support of up to \$500,000 upfront, and then up to \$2.5 million to match donations in support of Hay-East. The provincial and federal governments worked as quickly as possible to complete the AgriRecovery assessment and to negotiate the details of the Canada-Ontario Forage and Livestock Transportation Assistance Initiative.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Phil McNeely: Thank you, Speaker, and through you to the minister: I'm glad to hear that the federal government had been willing to co-operate with the Ontario government in assisting farmers during this difficult period. I've heard from farmers in my constituency, and they are pleased the program is available for them this year.

Nevertheless, this has not been easy for anyone. Farmers are concerned about the timing of the program and whether it will be effective for them. Specifically, there has been a call for an extension of the program.

Minister, can you please address this concern?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I've heard this a number of times. I heard it from the members opposite, but I also heard it directly from farmers, that there was an issue around the timing.

So last week I asked ministry staff to look at options for extending the timelines and to work with the federal government on extending the existing program, because that would require their co-operation. Right now, ministry and Agricorp staff are available to assist producers with their application forms because part of the issue around the timing—and this is what farmers have said to me—is that the forms are very complicated, and so they need some support in helping to fill those out, Mr.

Speaker. I'm looking forward to that federal-provincial collaboration.

I just want to comment that this support that I spoke about in the first part of my answer was actually on top of existing business risk management programs, especially \$106 million from Ontario's own Risk Management Program. So these were additive dollars.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: My question today is for the Minister of Transportation. In July 2011, a cabinet minute on Project Vapour—your government's code name for the Oakville gas plant cancellation—was circulated. You were a member of cabinet at that time. But on September 26, 2012, you stood in the House and stated, "I have looked at them. I don't see a lot wanting. I don't see much substantive that's missing." Minister, you knew full well at that time that none of the Project Vapour documents were among those that had been released by your government prior.

Minister, I ask you today: Do you stand by your statement in the House that I just read to you, or will you do the honourable thing today and apologize to the members of this House and to the people of Ontario?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: To the government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: I'd like to share some quotes with the member opposite here. On October 1, 2011, the Leader of the Opposition talking about the Mississauga power plant: "We don't support ... it."

September 25, 2011, in the *Globe and Mail*, the Leader of the Opposition: "We've opposed these projects in Oakville and Mississauga."

From October 5, 2011, the Canadian Press: "Asked if he'd scrap the Mississauga plant if he formed the next government, Hudak replied"—and this is my favourite—"That's right. Done. Done, done, done."

So my question to the honourable member is, why will the Progressive Conservatives not come forward with the costing and the policy analysis they did in terms of cancelling this plant? It obviously is a top-of-mind issue, it's the only question they've asked here today, and I'm sure they have a lot to talk about their position going into that election and why they opposed it.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I asked the question to Minister Murray. It's too bad you've got to turn the question over to this guy.

We know Project Vapour was a term cabinet was aware of, discussed and was briefed on back in 2011. You knew what it meant and what it referred to, that being the Oakville cancellation. You knew when you stood in the House to debate the contempt motion last September that no Project Vapour documents had been released to anyone, yet you said, "Unless we have evidence to the contrary, it is our responsibility to take their word as honourable people."

1110

Obviously their word wasn't good enough, and neither is yours. Your credibility is on the ropes here, so please don't pass this question on. You're part of the Liberal team that spent a billion dollars to save the political careers of five of your seatmates.

I ask you again: Will you stand in the house today and apologize to the hard-working people of Ontario, and will you ask all of your Liberal colleagues to do the same thing? Please answer the question. Don't—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Government House leader?

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, that member opposite was part of a Progressive Conservative team that went into the last election over and over again and talked about how they would cancel the plant in Mississauga.

We have asked them again and again to talk about their costing, to talk about their policy analysis, to table the information that I know they must have about the work they've done.

Mr. Speaker, the promise they made was to cancel the plant. "Done, done, done," said the Leader of the Opposition. At the end of the day, it was a promise they made and it was a promise we kept.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): New question.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order, please. Order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Now, as we get to this point where I do get attention: For those who are not sitting in their seats, I will ask them to sit in them so I can call them to order anyway.

New question. The member from Kenora–Rainy River.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Ms. Sarah Campbell: Thank you, Speaker. To the Minister of Finance: Municipalities across the north have expressed deep concern with the MPAC assessment process. A few weeks ago, the city of Dryden received devastating news that MPAC had reduced the assessment of its Domtar mill by an astonishing 72%. This reassessment will result in the city losing \$1 million in property taxes this year and having to repay Domtar \$5.4 million, or roughly 25% of its operating budget for the past four years.

Will the minister act now to review this flawed process that threatens to devastate small communities across the province and issue a stay of decision until a permanent solution is found?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Thank you for the question. It is something that I addressed yesterday as well in this House. It's something that we are going to look at. I know the ARB decisions have been made. We are taking the extra steps to ensure that they're making progress, and I've asked my staff to look into it.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary? The member from Welland.

Ms. Cindy Forster: My question is to the Minister of Finance as well. Last week Niagara Falls and the surrounding region were ordered to repay the Niagara-area casinos \$16 million after an MPAC reassessment of the casinos. In addition, local governments will lose an additional \$6 million in future tax revenue from those casinos.

Will this government order an immediate review of the Niagara casino reassessment decision, which threatens to devastate another community in Niagara and in this province?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, the member from Niagara Falls actually approached me on this yesterday as well. As I've said repeatedly, it's something that we're reviewing. We want to make certain that the process is appropriate and that we're taking the necessary steps to facilitate municipalities.

Certainly, this government has gone out of its way to upload as many services as we can, to provide the supports necessary to municipalities, and we'll always partner with them. We recognize there is only one taxpayer in this system. We have to make certain that the public and those who are affected are appropriately assessed. We will do everything necessary to protect them as well.

WOMEN'S ISSUES

Ms. Soo Wong: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister responsible for women's issues. As you know, this week is International Women's Week. This is a time to celebrate and reflect on the leadership and achievements of women around the world and right here in Ontario. This week, we recognize how much the women's movement has accomplished over the past 100 years.

Our province made history this year with the first-ever female Premier, and I'm very proud that that is part of this history.

Of course, we know that there's more work to be done, especially when it comes to the violence women continue to face. Domestic violence is a very serious problem that crosses economic, social and cultural barriers. Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister: What is our government doing to halt domestic violence and support victims?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: Thank you to the member from Scarborough–Agincourt for asking this important question, and for her advocacy on this issue.

The member is right: Violence against women is far too prevalent in our society. Every woman deserves to live her life free of fear. Every child deserves to grow up knowing there is no threat of violence in their home.

The importance of this theme is recognized in this year's International Women's Day. The United Nations theme is "A promise is a promise: Time for action to end violence against women."

What we have seen is by working together, we can better support victims and we can put an end to domestic

violence in the long term. We've seen the positive effects of our efforts in that regard. That's why the province supports the Neighbours, Friends and Families public education campaign. It's a campaign that teaches people how to recognize the signs of abuse and what they can do to help. It's why we've trained 28,000 front-line workers and it's why we have expanded language interpretation services.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Soo Wong: These are extremely important initiatives our government has taken to help women who are victims of domestic violence.

We know that one of the best ways to help women escape these circumstances is to help them achieve economic independence. I'm very proud as a member of this government, which has consistently prioritized the economic independence of women in my riding of Scarborough—Agincourt.

In a time when we have to reinvent our economy through new and innovative businesses, we find women who wish to start their own business but are faced with economic barriers. We know that with the right skills, training and support, we can remove these barriers and help women become successful business owners and entrepreneurs.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister: What is the government doing to help low-income women get the skills and support they need to build their own small businesses and careers?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: Microlending has been proven to be effective in lifting women out of poverty here in Ontario and around the world. I was so proud to stand with my colleague, now the Minister of Research and Innovation, to announce the establishment of the Micro-lending for Women in Ontario program to add to this record.

Through this program, we are going to help low-income women start and build their own businesses. With a commitment of \$760,000 over the next three fiscal years, our government will use the microlending program to help low-income women across the province. Under the program, as many as 400 women who are business-ready will be eligible for microloans to help them build and grow their businesses.

In the words of Kirsten Eastwood, the executive director of the Women's Centre for York Region, "We wanted to create a well-rounded program that would not only give applicants the knowledge and support needed to run a successful business but the self-confidence to start one from the ground up."

POWER PLANTS

Ms. Laurie Scott: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. In the weeks leading up to the 2011 general election, a cabinet document was circulated, using the code name Project Vapour. It has since been determined that this was your government's veiled reference to the Oakville gas plant cancellation.

Obviously you were a member of the cabinet at that time, but on October 1 of this past year, you stood in this House and stated—and I quote from Hansard—"Documents were requested, flags were raised, the debate and the discussion ensued and the documents in their entirety have been provided to this Legislature."

When you made that statement, you were well aware of the fact that no Project Vapour documents had been provided by your government. In light of this, I would ask whether you are sticking to your previous statement, which I just read, or whether you will do the honourable thing and apologize to the members of this House and the people of Ontario.

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, we are in the 21st century, so let's talk about Twitter, shall we?

Just to echo back what the member said, tell me about the weeks leading up to the 2011 election when Geoff Janoskic, the Mississauga South PC candidate, was tweeting the following: "An Ontario PC govt will stop the plant for good." That was September 24, 2011. The next day he tweeted, "@timhudak government will cancel this power plant." The same day he tweeted, "A @timhudak PC govt will cancel the east Miss power plant once and for all."

Again, since the Progressive Conservative Party has spent the entire question period talking about it—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Lanark, come to order.

Hon. John Milloy: —I imagine there is accounting, there is costing, there are policy documents, and we look forward to seeing those, and having the Progressive Conservative Party explain their position heading into the last election.

1120

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Laurie Scott: Well, Mr. Speaker, I again try to give the opportunity back to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to apologize. We all know very well that the cabinet had the documents relating to Project Vapour. She was a member of that cabinet at that time. I can repeat the quote if she likes, but we know what she said.

I'm giving her an opportunity—she's an honourable lady—to apologize to the people of the Legislature and the people of Ontario. So, I ask the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to please answer the question, not the House leader who has already apologized.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, if I can borrow from some of the heckles that have come from my side of the House: When the horse is dead, it's time to dismount.

I mean the simple fact is that last October—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, last October, I rose in this House, as did the then Minister of Energy, and provided an explanation to the Legislature about the

situation related to comments that were made during the debate that the member references. At the same time, several weeks ago, a point of privilege was made and yesterday, Mr. Speaker, you delivered your ruling. I think the tradition of this House, if I'm not mistaken, is that the matter has been dealt with.

Again, there are all sorts of questions surrounding the gas plant issue, and we look forward to learning about the Progressive Conservatives and the work that they did heading up to the 2011 election, and their very firm promise to relocate this gas plant.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: My question is to the Premier. Senior citizens are very concerned and losing sleep in London. Residents of the Cherryhill apartment complex may not be able to afford to keep a roof over their heads if the Ontario Landlord and Tenant Board allows a corporate developer to slap them with huge retroactive rent increases above and beyond the legal yearly limit.

My question is simple: What will this government do to protect seniors living on a fixed income in London and across the province from unaffordable rent hikes?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: I want to thank the member for the question. Obviously I wouldn't be talking about a specific issue, but certainly this ministry works very closely with municipalities and landlords in order to find a solution because affordable housing, as everybody knows, is something that our government has been working on very hard over the last decade, and has made a difference. Affordable housing is certainly a strong need for those vulnerable populations like our seniors, and it's something that we work hard to find a resolution to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Speaker, the Ontario Liberal budget in 2012 cut the operating budget of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing for the fourth time in the last four years, and that's a 12% reduction from 2009.

Back to the Premier: Seniors living in the Cherryhill apartment complex are worried sick about making ends meet. Yesterday, over 200 seniors went through the ordeal of climbing on a bus and sitting all day through an Ontario Landlord and Tenant Board hearing that will decide if many of them can afford to stay in their homes. This isn't the kind of excursion Ontario seniors should have to make.

When will this government commit to protecting seniors living on a fixed income from massive rent hikes they simply can't afford?

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: Certainly this government believes that safe, affordable housing contributes to the health and the livelihoods of our communities. We work hard to find resolutions and limits to the amount of increases, and the Landlord and Tenant Board is one of

those tribunals that can help those individuals find a resolution—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew, come to order—again.

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: Certainly our government has invested more in affordable housing than any other government before. We're proud of our record. It's something that we can work on with municipalities and with residents' groups, and I look forward to working with the member on this.

ABORIGINAL LAND CLAIMS

Mr. Grant Crack: My question is to the very knowledgeable Minister of Aboriginal Affairs. I've been hearing a lot about the Algonquin land claim in eastern Ontario. In my riding of Glengarry-Prescott-Russell, we're also reading about it in the local news, and we're also hearing about it on local radio. More specifically, we're hearing about some of the specific elements of what we can expect to see in a proposed settlement.

Speaker, it sounds as though there has been significant progress made in the negotiation of the Algonquin land claim. Can the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs please provide us with an update regarding the status of the land claim negotiations and what this means for my constituents in Glengarry-Prescott-Russell and for all of the people of Ontario?

Hon. David Zimmer: Thank you for the question. Canada, Ontario and the Algonquins have been working together for a number of years to resolve the historic aboriginal land claim. A negotiated settlement of the Algonquin land claim will produce Ontario's first modern constitutionally protected treaty.

In December 2012, the negotiators reached a milestone in the negotiation process with the release of their preliminary draft agreement. While this is not the final product, it's a significant development in the negotiations process. The draft preliminary agreement in principle sets out the main elements of a potential settlement. They include: a transfer of certain Ontario crown lands to Algonquin ownership, a financial settlement provided by Canada and Ontario, and defined Algonquin rights related to lands and natural resources.

This is important. No new—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Grant Crack: Thank you, Minister, for that thorough answer. It's great to hear that progress is being made in settling this important land claim. I know that once a final settlement is reached, it's going to benefit the economic development of the entire region and will strengthen the relationships that we have with our First Nation partners.

Mr. Speaker, some of my constituents in Glengarry-Prescott-Russell have inquired as to how the proposed elements of the land claim settlement as outlined in the draft agreement in principle will impact them directly.

We all recognize here in this House the importance of public consultations.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs: Will there be an opportunity for my constituents to engage directly with members of the negotiating team and have these specific questions answered?

Hon. David Zimmer: As I was saying, no new reserves will be created, Algonquin Park will be preserved for the enjoyment of all, and land will not be expropriated from private owners as a result of this settlement.

Now, with respect to the agreement in principle, we've had lengthy negotiations since May: 40 municipal negotiations and two MPP briefings for the opposition members. The preliminary draft treaty is on the website, and at the recent ROMA conference, I met with any number of delegations. There will be public consultations conducted as follows: in Ottawa, in Perth, in Kingston, in North Bay, in Mattawa, in Pembroke, in Bancroft and in Toronto. These public negotiations will be conducted over the next few days.

This government will always conduct its negotiations with the aboriginal community and the people of Ontario in a meaningful way, in a respectful way, and in a transparent way.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. John O'Toole: My question is to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. Minister, in July 2011, a cabinet minute on Project Vapour, code name for the Oakville gas plant cancellation, was circulated. Minister, you were a senior member of—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Attorney General, come to order.

Mr. John O'Toole: However, on September 27 last year, you stood—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Attorney General will come to order. He also knows that I've made a comment about this before: We will always refer to the members by their riding or their role.

Carry on, please.

Mr. John O'Toole: Thank you very much for that intervention, Mr. Speaker.

I'm reading from Hansard, Minister. This is what you said: "The official opposition and the third party have attempted to create ... a myth that the" Ministry of Energy "wilfully attempted to hide or conceal these documents from the Legislature.... Nothing could be further from the truth." That's what you said.

We know full well that you knew all about Project Vapour, and none of that was released in the documents by your government. You knew that as well.

So I ask you today, Minister: Would you stand and apologize, as minister, to this House for those beguiling remarks to this House?

1130

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: I'm happy to repeat again: Last October—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I think it's just about enough from everybody.

Minister.

Hon. John Milloy: Last October I stood in this House, as did the former Minister of Energy, and provided an explanation of what happened. Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, after careful consideration, you brought forward a ruling—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Leeds-Grenville has a warning.

Hon. John Milloy: You brought forward a considered ruling and, Mr. Speaker, I believe it's the tradition of this place that now means the matter is settled.

But there's a more important issue. I've yet to hear from the Progressive Conservatives or the New Democrats why, yesterday at the committee—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Simcoe-Grey, come to order.

Hon. John Milloy: —when the government attempted to put forward a motion—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from St. Catharines, come to order.

Hon. John Milloy: —Mr. Speaker, a motion which would have asked the government to produce all the documents that we had on the gas plant, going far beyond anything that had been requested in the past, the opposition voted against it. They talk about transparency, but their actions—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. John O'Toole: It's a question back to the minister. Minister, I'd ask you not to refer it to the House leader, to receive the same dumb answer every single time.

We knew—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. I suspect that you've gotten the idea that I'm a little on the edge now, and to get the Speaker to that point took a lot. Whoever said that: I can show you.

Finish, please.

Mr. John O'Toole: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Minister, again, you knew about Project Vapour as a member of cabinet. You were aware of it. It was discussed, and you were briefed. Nothing could be clearer that you knew full well—what I repeated to you, in Hansard, which you said on the 27th. You knew full well—I believe that you misled the House. All I'm asking from you today is to—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member will withdraw.

Mr. John O'Toole: I withdraw that remark. I could probably use another word.

But what I'm saying is, all I'm asking you to do is to take the opportunity—the galleries are full; the people of Ontario are listening—to please stand up and withdraw the remark, or at least apologize. Take this opportunity—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Again, I respond to some of the heckles I'm hearing when I refer to yesterday's committee meeting.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Haldimand–Norfolk, come to order.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I have here a transcript of the vote that was called for by the Chair. It says: "We are now ready to proceed with the vote"—that's on the government motion. "Those in favour again of the motion minus paragraph 2?"

You know who put their hands up, Mr. Speaker? The government put their hands up, because we are anxious to provide those documents to the committee. You know who opposed it, Mr. Speaker? The members of the Progressive Conservative Party and the members of the New Democratic Party.

And there's this issue of paragraph 2. That was a discussion that we tried to start about political parties coming forward with their documents. But you know what was surprising, Mr. Speaker? When it came to the question of the Progressive Conservatives providing their documents, all of a sudden the opposition didn't want to talk about it. The opposition had absolutely no interest in talking about political parties bringing it forward, Mr. Speaker.

They have lots to explain, Mr. Speaker, and we—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

AIR-RAIL LINK

Hon. Jonah Schein: Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Transportation. The NDP has long argued that the new Union Pearson Express line should run on electric, not on diesel trains. On Monday, the minister said that electrification was possible by 2017.

Minister, are you making a firm commitment to run electric trains on the Union Pearson Express line in 2017? To the minister: We would appreciate a simple yes-or-no answer.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I have learned in my political life to, quite frankly, under-promise and over-deliver on things. We said—and most of it, we've been able to achieve. Myself and the member from York South-Weston are working very hard together to achieve electrification by that date.

Mr. Speaker, I have always been surprised—and I really do sincerely believe that the third party is very concerned about the environment. This government has been trying to move electrification forward. Our GO trains right now: The new diesel is 75% more clean than the best other diesel in the world.

I live half a block from the Gardiner Expressway, the CNCP line and GO line. I know what the air quality challenges are there. I know that many of these lines run through the same members opposite—this government has closed coal plants and brought air quality up—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Jonah Schein: With all due respect, talk is cheap, and the minister has not actually answered our question.

There is no disagreement about this. Metrolinx has said that this should be electrified, and our communities have asked for it to be electrified from the very beginning. Our communities are sick of hearing half-truths and platitudes and broken promises.

Back to the minister: In 2017, will these trains be run on electronic energy or will they be fueled by more Liberal broken promises?

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew, third time and last.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, there are three parties in this House and there are three positions on transit. There is the party opposite that thinks that transit projects are bulldozers filling in subway lines; they like to destroy transit. There is the third party that has never really built very much transit, but gee, they like to talk about it a lot. There is this party, that is spending 400% more than previous governments on infrastructure. It's building more rapid transit, more subways, more LRTs; putting more money into it; cleaning up air.

When I came back to Toronto 10 years ago, we had over 50 smog days. Last summer, we hardly had any at all. That's because of cleaner transportation and cleaner energy. You'd think the third party would champion that.

MIDWIFERY

Mrs. Laura Albanese: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Midwives are gaining popularity in today's society and in my riding of York South-Weston. Midwives now play an integral role in providing health care services to expecting mothers. In our province, however, four out of every 10 women who seek the services of a midwife are unable to obtain one. We need to work to ensure that those who would like access to services offered by midwives are able to do so.

Through you, Speaker, to the minister: Is this government increasing access to midwife services?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thanks so much to the member for that question. Midwives provide exceptional care to women and babies across Ontario. Their care has been shown to lead to fewer medical and surgical interventions. That provides better value to our health care system and, most importantly, benefits mothers and their babies.

I want to thank midwives for the important work they do, and I want them to know that I'm committed to supporting midwives and giving more Ontario women and families the opportunity to receive the midwife care that they want. We're putting our money where our mouth is:

Funding for the midwifery program is five times what it was when we were elected. We're increasing the number of midwives by 50%. We've increased the number of midwife seats. As a result, more women are getting the care they want from midwives. The new news is, we're adding two new birth centres in this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would seek unanimous consent for the House to expect the Liberal Party to expand their vocabulary and include the word "sorry."

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Unanimous consent was sought. Agreed?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I heard a no.

This House has no deferred votes and stands recessed until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1139 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

M^{me} France Gélinas: Mr. Speaker, you know that I don't get visitors very often. Well, today, I do.

It is my pleasure to introduce to you Tammy Stevens, her mother, Christine Stevens, and her sister, Tina Makell. It's also my pleasure to introduce the MP for Nickel Belt, Mr. Claude Gravelle. Welcome to Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We welcome our guests to the Legislature. You get to tell whether or not it's the same between Ottawa and Ontario, if you watch.

Introduction of guests?

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It's a shame you missed question period.

The member for Prince Edward–Hastings.

Mr. Todd Smith: I'd like to welcome Sharon Shortt, who is the past president of the Quinte and District Real Estate Board and the member of the pack. We welcome her for the first time to Queen's Park.

Mr. John O'Toole: I'd like to welcome members of the midwifery profession who are giving a lecture here at Queen's Park today. Some of them are from the riding of Durham. Welcome to Queen's Park.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Well, it's a little bit embarrassing, because they don't seem to be here yet, mais les étudiants du Parlement jeunesse devraient être ici dans quelques minutes, donc j'aimerais leur souhaiter la bienvenue à Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Merci beaucoup.

It is now time for statements.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

FAMILY LAW

Mr. Robert Bailey: Across the province, men and women are calling for change in the way the family law

court system handles sensitive matters before the courts. Designed to help mitigate challenges that arise from unwinding legally recognized partnerships and marriages, today many view the family law court system in Ontario as a barrier to amicable, affordable and timely resolutions.

In Sarnia–Lambton, an advocacy group called Canadians For Family Law Reform have repeatedly tried to schedule an audience with the Ministry of the Attorney General to discuss their ongoing concerns with the family law court system, and as the member of provincial Parliament for Sarnia–Lambton, I have written to the Attorney General on multiple occasions asking that he make the effort to meet with the CFFLR and address their concerns. On each occasion, the Ministry of the Attorney General's staff has refused to hold even a single meeting with these constituents.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to demand that the Attorney General of Ontario direct his immediate attention to the family law court system in Ontario, and respectfully request once again that you immediately meet with Canadians For Family Law Reform to address their concerns with the Family Court system in Ontario.

TRUE NORTH HARDWOOD PLYWOOD

Mr. John Vanthof: True North Hardwood Plywood could have just been another footnote in the history of Timiskaming–Cochrane. The facility had been permanently closed, throwing 200 people out of work—just another casualty of the forestry collapse that swept Ontario, but the people of Cochrane refused to let one of their major employers go down without a fight. They would not take no for an answer.

The community banded together and looked for partners and investors to revive the facility. It was a long, hard fight with a few bumps along the road, but the community persevered and a deal was struck with former employees of the mill, the Taykwa Tagamou Nation and CMV Investments, a company with ready access to the American market.

The new team again faced many hurdles in their task of reopening the mothballed mill, but once again they rose to the challenge and True North Hardwood Plywood soon had product rolling out the door to eager customers.

Sadly, they have now encountered their greatest hurdle: lack of wood supply. How can that be? The mill has an operating licence issued by the province and the wood allotment associated with that licence. The majority of this allotment is through a ministerial directive. They have entered into MOUs with other companies as directed by MNR. The company, the mayor of Cochrane and I have all urged the past and current Ministers of Natural Resources to intervene. The fact remains that, in this case the Ontario crown forest is not being put to the best end use.

Once again, I ask the Minister of Natural Resources to intervene to ensure that jobs at True North are not jeopardized by government inaction.

SARS

Ms. Soo Wong: I would like to take this opportunity today to recognize the 10th anniversary of the SARS outbreak in Canada, one of the worst health crises to ever hit Canada. I would like to recognize the impact of this crisis on Ontario, especially in my riding of Scarborough—Agincourt.

In March 2003, the World Health Organization first issued a global SARS alert after Sui-chu Kwan, a 78-year-old resident in my riding of Scarborough—Agincourt, died in Toronto of what became known as sudden acute respiratory syndrome, better known as SARS. Her son also died at Scarborough Grace Hospital a week later. Scarborough Hospital, then known as Scarborough Grace Hospital, was closed down temporarily on March 23, 2003.

Ontario saw 247 probable cases and 43 deaths.

My community suffered extensively during the SARS crisis. There was limited support and assistance to the community. Then-Premier Ernie Eves refused to provide adequate grant compensation to those forced to take time off or whose businesses were affected as a result of the deadly disease.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to recognize the survivors and the many heroes who have lost their lives while caring for others, as well as the families who lost loved ones. I also want to pay tribute to the businesses and residents in my riding of Scarborough who suffered extensively, but today they remain a strong and vibrant community.

MILTON'S WALK OF FAME

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: It's my pleasure to rise in the House this afternoon and congratulate the latest inductees into the town of Milton's Walk of Fame in my riding of Halton.

Mr. Kevin Callan: Kevin is the author of 15 books, including the bestselling *The Happy Camper*. Mr. Callan writes periodicals for Canoeroots magazine; is a frequent guest on CBC Radio, Canada A.M. and Breakfast Television; and is one of Canada's foremost canoeists.

Mr. Lloyd Chisholm, 1911 to 1992: Lloyd served on a number of citizens' boards, including the Canadian Guernsey cattle association and the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair. Mr. Chisholm was recognized for his accomplishments in the Canadian horse racing industry by being inducted into the Canadian Horse Racing Hall of Fame. He was also the proud owner of two royal grand champion all-Canadian cows, a very rare feat.

Mr. Norman Etheridge: Mr. Etheridge is an aircraft maintenance engineer and was inducted into the Canadian Aircraft Maintenance Engineers Hall of Fame in 2012 for his leadership in rebuilding the Avro Lancaster, one of only two World War II Lancaster bombers in the world that still fly today. Canadian Warplane Heritage Museum officials have steadfastly maintained that the Lancaster would not have returned to the air without the

leadership and knowledge of Norman Etheridge. Apparently, when he arrived there was a fuselage and a pile of parts, and he put it all together.

Mr. Ronald Roberts: Ronald was a hockey executive of the World Hockey Association and later for the National Hockey League. He negotiated more than 100 contracts for professional hockey players and coaches. Mr. Roberts represented players in negotiations for the 1974 US-Canada summit series—that's the one we won—and played hockey himself for the Milton Merchants, Galt Red Wings and Scotland's Dundee Tigers.

Congratulations to these four great men and their contributions to Canada.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good-news stories always get a little lenience.

LONDON CARNIVAL

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'm happy to stand in front of members of the Legislature today to talk about a winter carnival I recently attended in northeast London.

The carnival was held on Saturday, February 23, hosted by Beacock library and organized by the North East Working Group. An estimated 400 children and adults came out to partake of this event. This was a wonderful community event and was an excellent opportunity for London families to get together and enjoy a day of free food, activities and games.

The Salvation Army was on-site, and volunteers were there to serve a chili lunch and a warm cup of hot chocolate. The fire department supplied a fire truck, and firefighters were there to help give tours of the fire truck and discuss fire prevention and the importance of smoke alarms with the community.

The London police department was also supporting the event and allowing the public to sit in one of their cruisers and try out the siren.

There were many activities for everyone to enjoy, like snowshoeing, potato sack races and snow sculpting outside, and a variety of literacy-based activities for children inside.

A lot of hard work and dedication went into planning this event, and I would like to thank all of the organizers and volunteers for making this such a huge success.

1510

This carnival was a great time for people in the community to build new relationships with others and an excellent opportunity for local organizations to showcase their support and commitment in building and strengthening the city of London.

TRAVEL INSURANCE

Mr. Bob Delaney: This message is to help Ontarians avoid a needless financial tragedy. With March break next week and warm weather approaching, many of us will travel or welcome guests here. If you're travelling outside Ontario, even for a day, and especially to the

United States, please ensure that you get third-party travel insurance for yourself and for each person travelling with you. The Ontario Health Insurance Plan will not cover all of the costs of even minor medical treatment in the United States. You can get insurance at your bank, through many credit cards, from your insurance agent or at any Canadian Automobile Association office. It's cheap. Please don't forget.

For everyone receiving a friend or a family member from abroad, please remember that the Ontario Health Insurance Plan does not cover your family members who are not full-time Ontario residents. Ensure that your guests visiting you from outside Ontario get third-party travel insurance in their country of origin and that it covers them from the day they get on the plane until the day they return home again.

Accidents and illnesses happen. For the sake of only a few dollars, don't run the needless and avoidable risk of a major financial tragedy.

ONTARIO COLLEGE OF TRADES

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: The following statement is an excerpt from a letter to the editor from Alberta electrician John, and it was sent to various papers across Ontario:

"The new Ontario College of Trades organization that will start next month is going to be the worst thing that happens to the Ontario labour system.

"I am an Alberta resident for the past 22 years after moving from the city of Sarnia and have always renewed my electrical licence with a simple \$60 fee every three years to the Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities. I heard about the Ontario College of Trades for the first time last week when I received a letter from them stating I will now have to pay them \$360 per three years.

"My current renewal through the Ontario colleges and universities expires in 2014. I have also been advised by the new Ontario College of Trades that I must start paying them immediately even though my tradesman certificate of qualification renewal was just completed through the government of Ontario.

"I have a choice. Pay them the ransom demands or lose my interprovincial electrical licence. I was told by the client services department at the Ontario College of Trades that I will have no benefit from the Ontario program, no say into the program and ongoing absurd maintenance fees in order for me to continue to hold my electrician trade certification. It is the most disgusting thing I have seen in my 33 years as a qualified tradesman.

"What does this mean to an Ontario young worker who may want to become a tradesman? He/she has choice. Start an apprenticeship and become a tradesman in Ontario that has too many new regulations in the new College of Trades and pay ongoing enormous membership fees in addition to skill improvement course fees or they could come to Alberta, where the licence is issued and good for life, with no ongoing fees or hurdles."

That is sent by electrician John.

MIDWIFERY

Mr. Phil McNeely: I'd like to use this opportunity to highlight a very special project in my community. Ottawa is home to a thriving midwifery practice called the Midwifery Group of Ottawa. Soon, the group will be the occupants of the new Ottawa Birth and Wellness Centre. This centre, announced in January, will be the second such establishment in Ontario providing mothers-to-be and their families with a broad range of programs and services led and delivered by Ontario midwives.

I want to congratulate Genevieve Gagnon on her tireless efforts educating people about the importance of building up the practice of midwifery in my own riding of Ottawa–Orléans. This centre is the culmination of years of hard work and reputation-building by dedicated midwives like Genevieve.

I was proud to accompany the health minister to make the announcement for the new centre, along with Ottawa Centre MPP Yasir Naqvi. Also in attendance at the announcement were Champlain LHIN CEO Chantale LeClerc and president Dr. Keon, both tireless champions of health care improvement in eastern Ontario.

The art and science of midwifery has served to help bring new lives into our world for centuries. An ancient practice, and often labelled as "alternative," midwifery has become very popular in modern society. So, today, I'd like to thank the midwives who are here with us today for demonstrating to us the wonderful care you offer to our Ontario mothers. I think we should give them a good hand.

NURSES

Mr. Bill Walker: It's my pleasure to rise in the House today to recognize the hard work and dedication of all nurses in my riding, and undoubtedly of all nurses across Ontario and Canada. I'd like to especially thank and extend my sincere congratulations to a number of nurses in Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound who were recently awarded by their patients and communities with the Caring Nurse Award from Bayshore's Healthy Tomorrows association for their outstanding work.

It is important to note that the work performed by these recipients and many other nurses goes beyond their work in local hospitals. Many nurses are involved in various initiatives involving their respective communities, and many also go above and beyond their expected duties to ensure patients are receiving the best care possible.

On that note, I would like to congratulate and thank Mamie De Groot, Robyn Hewson, Shelly Dolson, Kim Calverley, Kory Whitlow, Garry O'Toole, Joan Stephenson, Pauline Wyville, Ann Thompson, Roberta Jackson, Margaret Thompson, Shirley McCarthy, Leanne Edwards, Brenda Merchant, Jennifer Cowan, Kari Johnson and Pauline Linton on receiving this Caring Nurse Award. They're perfect examples of dedicated, determined and hard-working nurses.

Having exceptional nurses is a vital component for the well-being of any community, and it is great to see that such hard work and dedication is being put in the spotlight.

Again, congratulations to all the recipients for this well-deserved recognition, and I thank all nurses for their outstanding work.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Halton on a point of order.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Mr. Speaker, in my statement I inadvertently suggested that the 1974 series was the one that we won. It was in the 1972 series that we beat the Russians—unmercifully, we beat them, actually. I wanted to correct my record on that.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): On that particular point of order: It's always in order for any individual member to correct their own record.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 98(c), a change has been made to the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business, such that Mr. Leone assumes ballot item number 8, Mr. Dunlop assumes ballot item number 11, Mr. Smith assumes ballot item number 9 and Mr. Wilson assumes ballot item number 10.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY AMENDMENT ACT (STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS FOR HEALTH CARE AND EDUCATION), 2013

LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE (COMITÉ PERMANENT DES COMPTES PUBLICS SUR LES SOINS DE SANTÉ ET L'ÉDUCATION)

Mr. Ouellette moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 23, An Act to amend the Legislative Assembly Act to establish the Standing Committee on Public Accounts for Health Care and Education / Projet de loi 23, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'Assemblée législative pour créer le Comité permanent des comptes publics sur les soins de santé et l'éducation.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: Effectively, what this bill does is it establishes a committee from the Auditor General that deals directly with health care and education. With health care and education taking in excess of 62% of the provincial budget, it gives the opportunity for the Auditor General to spend the due time necessary to ensure that they're functioning in the best interests of the populace of the province of Ontario.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY AMENDMENT ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE

Ms. Fife moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 24, An Act to amend the Legislative Assembly Act with respect to prorogation / Projet de loi 24, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'Assemblée législative relativement à la prorogation.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Mr. Speaker, the bill amends the Legislative Assembly Act as follows:

(1) The Premier is prohibited from advising the Lieutenant Governor to prorogue the Legislature unless the assembly has adopted a resolution in support of the prorogation.

1520

(2) If the Lieutenant Governor prorogues the Legislature, the Premier is required to advise the Lieutenant Governor to call it back within the time frame set out in the assembly's resolution and to announce the return date promptly and publicly.

(3) The powers of the crown to prorogue, dissolve or summon the Legislature are preserved.

CONGREGATION OF THE SISTERS OF ST. JOSEPH IN CANADA ACT, 2013

Mr. Crack moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr13, An Act to amalgamate The Sisters of St. Joseph of Hamilton, The Sisters of St. Joseph of the Diocese of London, in Ontario, The Sisters of St. Joseph of the Diocese of Peterborough in Ontario and Sisters of St. Joseph for the Diocese of Pembroke in Canada.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to standing order 86, this bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

SICK DAYS ARE FOR SICK PEOPLE ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 RÉSERVANT LES JOURNÉES DE CONGÉ DE MALADIE AUX PERSONNES MALADES

Mr. O'Toole moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 25, An Act governing sick days in the broader public sector / Projet de loi 25, Loi régissant les journées de congé de maladie dans le secteur parapublic.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. John O'Toole: The bill enacts the “sick days are for people who are ill” act, 2013. Under the act, public sector employers are not permitted to compensate employees for unused sick days. That’s the intent of the bill.

LIVING WITHIN OUR MEANS ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR LA NÉCESSITÉ DE VIVRE SELON NOS MOYENS

Mr. Leone moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 26, An Act to enact the Balanced Budget Act, 2013 and to amend the Financial Administration Act / Projet de loi 26, Loi édictant la Loi de 2013 sur l'équilibre budgétaire et modifiant la Loi sur l'administration financière.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Rob Leone: The short title of this bill is the Living Within Our Means Act, 2013. It's a bill that will enact balanced budget legislation to ensure that this Legislature finally approves a budget that is balanced, and that it holds the government accountable and responsible for doing so. If they don't balance the budget, the cabinet and the executive council have to reduce their pay. In addition to that, there is a debt limit provision that we will not put more debt on the backs of our children, and we cap that debt at 50% of GDP.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS CONSOLIDATION ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR LA FUSION DES PROGRAMMES D'AIDE SOCIALE

Mr. Barrett moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 27, An Act to require the introduction of legislation for a consolidated program of disability support and employment and other financial assistance / Projet de loi 27, Loi exigeant le dépôt d'un projet de loi créant un programme qui regroupe le soutien aux personnes handicapées, l'aide à l'emploi et d'autres aides financières.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Toby Barrett: The bill requires the Minister of Community and Social Services to introduce a bill in the assembly that merges the program established by the Ontario Disability Support Program Act, 1997, and the program established by the Ontario Works Act, 1997, into one consolidated program that is administrated by the same body, in this case, at the local level, the municipal or First Nations level. One purpose is to ensure that the services available to those on disability remain distinct.

ELECTRONIC COMMERCE AMENDMENT ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LE COMMERCE ÉLECTRONIQUE

Mr. Smith moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 28, An Act to amend the Electronic Commerce Act, 2000 / Projet de loi 28, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur le commerce électronique.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Todd Smith: This bill is aimed at removing red tape in the real estate industry. It would remove the current exemption from the act for documents, including agreements of purchase and sale, that create or transfer interests in land and require a registration to be effective against third parties. However, those documents are subject to requirements of subsection 11 relating to the reliability of electronic signatures.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY JOURNÉE INTERNATIONALE DE LA FEMME

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: It's my pleasure to rise today to recognize this week as International Women's Week and this Friday, March 8, as International Women's Day.

C'est un moment pour célébrer les réalisations et le leadership des femmes dans le monde entier et ici en

Ontario. C'est un jour pour nous remémorer quel chemin les femmes ont parcouru et pour essayer d'imaginer jusqu'où nous pouvons aller.

This is a time to celebrate the achievements and the leadership of women around the world and here in Ontario. It's a day to look back on how far women have come and ahead at how far we can go.

In Ontario, we are marking two important milestones in progress for women this year: the 30th anniversary of the creation of the Ontario Women's Directorate, and Ontario's first female Premier. Both events speak to the continual evolution in the role of women in Ontario society and the need for government to lead in building further opportunities for women.

This year, the United Nations' theme for International Women's Day is "A promise is a promise: Time for action to end violence against women."

En qualité de ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine et de ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales, ma promesse aux femmes ontariennes est que je continuerai à prendre des mesures pour mettre fin à la violence faite aux femmes.

As minister responsible for women's issues and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, my promise to the women of Ontario is that we will continue to take action to end violence against women. I am proud when I see the difference our domestic violence and sexual violence action plans are already making in the lives of women who have experienced abuse. But I also realize that violence will only end when many voices say in unison, "A promise is a promise. Let's end violence against women"—voices like those of the courageous women in India who spoke out against the epidemic of violence toward women in their communities; voices like those in support of Malala Yousafzai, the 15-year-old Pakistani girl who was shot because she advocated for girls' rights to education; voices like those that took part in the One Billion Rising campaign's events in 205 countries around the world on February 14.

1530

These growing and vocal movements around the world signal progress. They demonstrate that women, men and young people can stand together and demand an end to violence. They put into action the words of Michelle Bachelet, executive director of UN Women, who said, "There is nothing excusable about violence against women and girls anywhere, at any time. Nothing."

Monsieur le Président, l'Ontario a la chance d'avoir des femmes et des jeunes filles qui prouvent qu'elles sont des leaders tous les jours. Six femmes remarquables ont reçu l'Ordre de l'Ontario plus tôt cette année. Et nous avons rendu hommage à 66 femmes et jeunes filles en leur décernant des certificats soulignant leurs réalisations dans le cadre du programme de reconnaissance des femmes et des jeunes filles chefs de file en développement communautaire pour leurs contributions à l'amélioration de la vie d'autres membres de leurs collectivités.

Mr. Speaker, Ontario is fortunate to have women and girls proving they are leaders every day. Six remarkable women were invested into the Order of Ontario earlier

this year, and 66 women and girls are being honoured with Leading Women, Building Communities and Leading Girls, Building Communities recognition certificates for their contributions to improving the lives of others in their communities.

Like many Ontario women, I was drawn to the fight for women's equality early. I volunteered at a women's shelter. That led to my law career, assisting women who are vulnerable and watching them find their own voices and become stronger.

I am proud of the progress that Ontario has made in the area of women's issues. I am proud that we can share our expertise with other jurisdictions and communities here and around the world. But we acknowledge that there is more to be done and more we can learn from our stakeholders, and particularly from the women of Ontario.

In honour of International Women's Week, I encourage all of us in this chamber to raise our voices: to raise our voices in support of equal opportunity; to raise our voices as we applaud the achievements of Ontario's outstanding female leaders; and to raise our voices to take action for an end to violence against women.

As author and activist Maya Angelou once said, "All great achievements require time." But let me assure you, Mr. Speaker, by working together, we will achieve true equality for women, we will build strong communities full of opportunity, and create a safe and fair society for all women and girls in Ontario and around the world.

MIDWIFERY

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, earlier today I was delighted to meet with some of our dedicated midwives at the Queen's Park reception for the Association of Ontario Midwives, and I had the joy of holding little Hugh as I gave my remarks.

I would like to again take this opportunity to thank our midwives for the exceptional care they provide to Ontario women and babies each and every day.

In a couple of days—on March 8, to be exact, Speaker—we will be celebrating International Women's Day, a day when we have a chance to raise awareness of women's issues, and amongst them, maternal, newborn and reproductive health. And when we think about maternal and newborn health here in Ontario, we are reminded of the tremendous contribution of midwives.

Midwifery care has been shown to lead to fewer medical and surgical interventions. That benefits both mothers and babies and provides better value to our health care system. That's why our government is committed to supporting midwives in providing the highest standard of care to Ontario women and families.

There are now about 640 midwives registered to practise here in Ontario. That's almost 60% of all midwives in Canada.

The midwifery profession has made great strides since we were elected in 2003. Over the past nine years, midwives' compensation has quite rightly increased by approximately 38%. Annual funding for the midwifery

program has increased to almost \$118 million, representing an almost 400% increase.

In addition, our government increased the enrolment of midwifery education seats by 50% at Ontario universities, from 60 people training to be midwives, to 90 seats, Speaker.

These investments mean that more than twice as many women now have access to midwifery services. In 2003, about 8,000 women had access; now it's 22,000 this year, Speaker.

You know, about 150,000 babies are born each year in Ontario, and now 15% or about 22,000 of those births will be delivered by midwives this year.

While this is wonderful news, we want to do even more. To continue improving care, I was delighted to announce last December and in January of this year that we are creating two provincially funded free-standing midwife-led birth centres: one in Ottawa and one in Toronto.

The Ottawa Birth and Wellness Centre will be on Carling Avenue in Ottawa South. It's set to open this summer and will provide mothers-to-be and their families with a broad range of programs and services led by midwives, with a special focus on the needs of the francophone population. The Ottawa Birth and Wellness Centre expects to provide services for about 500 births each year.

The Toronto Birth Centre is set to open its doors later this year. Located in Regent Park, it will bring together GTA midwives in a community partnership. It also expects to provide services for approximately 500 births a year, with a focus on providing culturally appropriate services for aboriginal women and their families.

The birth centre model will ensure that low-risk pregnant women get the right care, at the right place, from the right provider, at the right time and at the right cost. That's what Ontario's Action Plan for Health Care is all about. We want to give Ontario mums more choices where to deliver their babies, especially women with low-risk pregnancies. At the same time, we want to free up hospital beds to focus on high-risk births.

Through the action plan, our government is committed to moving routine procedures out of hospitals and into specialized, not-for-profit clinics in the community when the evidence shows that better-quality care and better patient outcomes can be achieved for better value.

Midwifery care can benefit the health care system with shorter lengths of hospital stay, fewer medical interventions and lower readmission rates. Birth centres can be an excellent environment for mums to give birth in a non-institutional setting. They give women and their families more freedom to choose who will attend the birth, and promote person-centred care.

I would also like to recognize the College of Midwives of Ontario for ensuring the safety of mums and babies at birth centres through their quality assurance role. College staff worked very, very hard all last summer on developing a quality assurance program and will continue to work with us to ensure that the safest care is provided by midwives in the community setting.

Most especially, Speaker, I know that all members of this Legislature would like to thank the members of the Association of Ontario Midwives for their ongoing and passionate commitment to the health of women and of babies and for working with us to give women greater choice in where to give birth.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Time for responses.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Ms. Laurie Scott: Today I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak on behalf of Tim Hudak, our leader, and our PC caucus in recognizing this week as International Women's Week and the 102nd anniversary of International Women's Day on March 8. This day provides us with an opportunity to recognize and applaud women's achievements as well as identify the challenges that still confront many women around the world.

In Ontario, the gains which women have made are notable. Take, for example, the continuing gains that women are making in education. Colleges and universities used to be a male-dominated world, with a smaller percentage of women than men pursuing post-secondary education.

Today, the situation is completely different. Women now outperform men in many measures of education achievement. Girls are more likely to earn their high school diplomas on time and are less likely to drop out. More women than men enrol in college and university programs after high school. Women are more likely to finish these programs with a diploma or degree.

In Ontario today, many women occupy positions of authority, demonstrating incredible talent and energy. My female colleagues in this chamber serve as just one shining example. Across the province, women can go to university; women can work and have a family; women have real choices and real opportunities.

Despite all these successes, women still face significant challenges. In Canada, women still, on average, earn less than men, even with the same education level. Women are less likely to be employed, and those with jobs are more likely to be working part-time. The majority of minimum-wage earners are women. For immigrant and aboriginal women, the numbers are even worse.

1540

In the corporate world, some women have broken through the glass ceiling, which has historically blocked access to the highest levels of achievement. However, the fact remains that 41% of companies listed on the Toronto Stock Exchange still have no women on their boards. This figure has not improved appreciably for the better part of a decade.

The UN has declared that this year's International Women's Day theme is "A promise is a promise: Time for action to end violence against women." This is a poignant reminder that around Canada and the world, far too many women remain at risk of violence. In the global context, many of the gains made by women in Ontario

have not been shared by women in other countries. Even in Canada, we know that many instances of sexual or domestic violence are simply not reported to the authorities.

I want to conclude by congratulating all the female trailblazers for their dedication and commitment to advancing women's rights and equality. International Women's Day provides us an opportunity to commemorate these efforts, celebrate progress and call for a commitment to continue the push for women's equality.

MIDWIFERY

Mrs. Christine Elliott: It's my pleasure to rise on behalf of the PC caucus to recognize the phenomenal work done by midwives during International Women's Week. I can't think of a more fitting time to celebrate the midwives who work so hard in our province to provide excellent care and keep expectant mothers healthy and safe.

Midwifery has long played a role in the prenatal care and birthing of babies around the world. Today, there are over 500 midwives in the province, including in rural, remote and northern areas, and today we did have the pleasure of welcoming a number of them here to Queen's Park. I actually had the chance to hold one of my newest constituents, eight-day-old baby Myka. It was a wonderful experience for all of us.

Since 1994, when Ontario became the first province in Canada to regulate the profession, midwives have attended more than 100,000 births in Ontario. Midwives understand that a thriving community is one where the health of its citizens is its top priority. This understanding is apparent through the work midwives do to keep their communities healthy and in the philosophy that guides their work.

Ontario midwifery is based on three principles. First, continuity of care: Midwives provide care throughout pregnancy, labour, birth and the first six weeks following birth. Second, informed choice: Midwives emphasize that women are active decision-makers in their care, and midwives offer information to help women make informed decisions. Third, choice of birthplace: Midwives are trained to help women give birth at home or in hospital. In fact, midwives are the only health professionals specifically trained in home birth.

We have tremendous respect for the values, skills and professionalism that midwives bring to our health care system. We would like to thank the midwives of Ontario and the Association of Ontario Midwives for the work they do every day to support and promote midwifery in Ontario and the health of women and children in this province.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: On behalf of Andrea Horwath, our leader, and all New Democrats, I want to herald and

extol women on International Women's Day and International Women's Week. However, unlike my friends here in the House, I think that we actually have to do something for women at this time.

We have had 10 years of Liberal government in this province, and under the Liberal government we have seen Victim Services, which is the only agency that goes out with the police on domestic violence calls and deals with women victims—we've seen their funding go from \$286 per victim to \$31 in 2010. These are our front-line workers—women workers, mainly—who work with women.

Under this Liberal government—10 years of Liberal government—we've seen women make 71 cents on every dollar. I've stood up seven years in a row and said this, and it still hasn't changed.

Under this Liberal government—10 years of Liberal government—we still have only one in 10 women in Ontario who have access to child care, Mr. Speaker. The average child care cost in this province is over \$1,000. No child care, no equality—it's that simple.

Under this Liberal government—10 years of Liberal government—we've seen dangerous offenders—and we had a case just recently—released on bail without proper assessments, who go and kill their spouses. I'm talking about domestic violence.

I stand here on behalf of all New Democrats and on behalf of women saying, we can do more, we must do more. Why aren't we doing more?

MIDWIFERY

Mme France Gélinas: It is my pleasure to welcome to Queen's Park midwives who have made the trip to come and visit us, and to say how proud I am to welcome them to the Legislature and how proud I am of the work that they do for the 22,000 families and their babies each and every year. To the 640 midwives who practice in Ontario in the 90 different communities where they have set up their practice, we say thank you.

Ontario midwives provide the best quality care. There are many, many stories of families that have been shared with me this afternoon and at lunchtime, and they were all good stories. The story of a woman who had her first child through C-section and, like many women, believed that after you had a C-section your next pregnancy had to go the same way—that's not the case. Her midwife was able to help her deliver a healthy baby through the natural birth canal, and she didn't have to go through that procedure.

That brings me to the point: Did you know, Mr. Speaker, that one woman in three delivers through C-section in this province? We are way off the charts. But when you look at the good work that our midwives do, they are at 15%, way more in line with the rest of the world. Why is that? Because of the quality care that they do. Did you know that if C-sections were able to go from 30% to 15%, our hospital sector would save \$29 million? Think of how many more midwives we could have,

because at the end of the day, the less intervention, the happier will be the mom and the baby, not only our health care system.

Also, New Democrats support midwives working to their full scope of practice. To this day, I don't understand why we're making it so hard for those women to do their work. There is still 23% of hospitals that limit their privileges so that they cannot access hospital births. Eleven per cent of hospitals in Ontario limit the number of births that they can do; that makes no sense. You're with a midwife but you're not allowed to deliver because—you will still deliver in that hospital, but under a physician's care, although the midwife is the one you want. That makes no sense.

Same thing with the scope of practice. The college has made sure that those women are able to do epidurals. HPRAC has cleared the way. We have passed a bill that said that they should be able to practise to their full scope, yet they go to those hospitals and the hospitals decide to play God and say, "No, you will not be allowed to give epidurals." An epidural is to help control the pain during childbirth, something that is sometimes very needed. Why is it that we continue that every step of the way for this profession has to be so hard is beyond me. But I will be there, I will help them, and every other New Democrat will do the same. To the midwives: Thank you, merci, meegwetch.

PETITIONS

ELECTRICITY GENERATION

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It is now time for petitions. Oh, I don't know, maybe the member from Durham.

Mr. John O'Toole: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's such a surprise.

Interjection: His first petition.

Mr. John O'Toole: Yes, my very first petition today to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, which reads as follows:

"Whereas on March 22, 2012, the Ontario government completed a review of the feed-in tariff"—commonly known as the FIT program—"renewable energy procurement program;

"Whereas the government stated 'Active participation of communities is important to the continued success of the FIT program' and the government acknowledged 'most local community and aboriginal projects require more time to mobilize'"—these are said by the government;

"Whereas active participation can be achieved by mobilizing 'community enterprises' to assess local energy generation opportunities and this development model provides a very high ROI"—return on investment—"for Ontarians by making certain that surplus revenues are reinvested for the betterment of" that community;

"Whereas a community energy act is necessary to overcome the hurdles to mobilization of community enterprises for electricity generation;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

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"That the members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario consider the need for a community energy act to help facilitate the mobilization of communities and financial resources for the purpose of developing community enterprises for electricity generation."

I'm pleased to submit this to the Legislature on behalf of Jeff Mole, and I'll sign it.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Ms. Cindy Forster: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Re: Dr. Kevin Smith's Niagara Health System report to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care proposed changes to the hospital services in south Niagara.

"Whereas the residents of south Niagara will not have equal, fair, safe and timely access to in-patient gynaecological, obstetrical and pediatric services due to distance; and

"Whereas excessive travel times and lack of public transportation for residents in south Niagara will put patient safety at risk; and

"Whereas if implemented, Dr. Smith's recommendations and the proposed location of a new south Niagara hospital in Niagara Falls is approved, a two-tier health system in Niagara will be created, where north Niagara will be overserviced and south Niagara will be underserviced in relation to the safe and timely access to health and hospital care; and

"Whereas if hospital services including in-patient gynaecological and mental health, and all obstetrical and pediatric services from the Welland hospital site and the Greater Niagara hospital site will be relocated to the new north Niagara St. Catharines site in 2013 it will undermine the continued viability of these two sites as full-service hospital sites;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"We request the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to maintain existing services at the Welland hospital site and the Niagara Falls hospital site and that no services are to be moved until this new south Niagara hospital is open and request that any approval for a new Niagara south hospital include a site that is centrally located in Welland."

Some 20,000 thousand signatures and climbing—I support this petition, I affix my signature, and I will give it to Jaden to take to the Clerk.

LANDFILL

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I have here a petition presented to me. It's to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and

the names were all gathered by the committee for social justice in Oxford county. They gathered over 2,000 names, Mr. Speaker.

“Whereas many of the resources of this planet are finite and are necessary to sustain both life and the quality of life for all future generations;

“Whereas the disposal of resources in landfills creates environmental hazards which will have significant human and financial costs for;

“Whereas all levels of government are elected to guarantee their constituents’ physical, financial, emotional and mental well-being;

“Whereas the health risks to the community and watershed increase in direct relationship to the proximity of any landfill site;

“Whereas the placement of a landfill in a limestone quarry has been shown to be detrimental;

“Whereas the placement of a landfill in the headwaters of multiple highly vulnerable aquifers is detrimental;

“Whereas the county of Oxford has passed a resolution requesting a moratorium on landfill construction or approval;

“Therefore be it resolved that we, the undersigned, humbly petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“To implement a moratorium in Oxford county on any future landfill construction or approval until such time as a full review of alternatives has been completed which would examine best practices in other jurisdictions around the world;

“That this review of alternatives would give special emphasis on (a) practices which involve the total recycling or composting of all products currently destined for landfill sites in Ontario and (b) the production of goods which can efficiently and practically be recycled or reused so as not to require disposal in landfills.”

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to present this petition, and I’ll affix my signature.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr. John Vanthof: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the District of Timiskaming Social Services Administration Board (DTSSAB) has decided to remove all security tenant positions from their affordable housing units across the district; and

“Whereas many buildings have high percentages of seniors who require more care than a 1-800 number can provide; and

“Whereas none of the tenants or security tenants were consulted regarding this drastic change to management at the affordable housing buildings;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To formally request District of Timiskaming Social Services Administration Board (DTSSAB) reverse their decision to dismiss the on-site 24-hour security personnel that is presently being utilized so they can install third

party 1-800 security services in the affordable housing buildings in the Timiskaming district.”

I agree and send this petition down with Jessica.

AGGREGATE EXTRACTION

Mr. Jim Wilson: A petition to uphold the decision of the consolidated hearings board for Duntroon quarry:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Office of Consolidated Hearings, a panel made up of two members of the Ontario Municipal Board and a vice-chair of the Environmental Review Tribunal, heard evidence for 139 days over the course of 39 weeks, where they heard from 36 experts, seven lay witnesses and numerous participants; and

“Whereas the evidence at the hearings made it overwhelmingly clear that the proposed Duntroon quarry would create over 150 jobs and contribute significantly to the local” community; and

“Whereas the proposal has been studied for nine years and represents the continuation of a long-established land use in the area, where an existing quarry has been operating for over 40 years without significant negative impacts; and

“Whereas Walker Industries has entered into agreements with Clearview township and the county of Simcoe to provide substantial benefits to the municipalities that are above and beyond those required by the Aggregate Resources Act, the Planning Act and the Municipal Act; and

“Whereas the haul route along Simcoe County Road 91 has been used for this purpose for more than 40 years, steps have been taken to minimize environmental impacts, and there has been no opposition from the Ministry of the Environment, the Ministry of Natural Resources, the county of Simcoe or Clearview township;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the McGuinty government respect the decision made by the Office of Consolidated Hearings and allow the Duntroon quarry to move forward so that our environment can be protected and good jobs can be maintained and created for local families in need of work.”

I agree with this petition and I sign it, and I remind the petitioners it is now the Wynne government.

AIR-RAIL LINK

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: This is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas diesel trains are a health hazard for people who live near them;

“Whereas more toxic fumes will be created by the 400 daily trains than the car trips they are meant to replace;

“Whereas the planned air-rail link does not serve the communities through which it passes and will be priced beyond the reach of most commuters;

"Whereas all major cities in the world with train service between their downtown core and the airport use electric trains;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the province of Ontario stop building the air-rail link for diesel and move to electrify the route immediately;

"That the air-rail link be designed, operated and priced as an affordable transportation option between all points along its route."

I could not agree more. I'm going to sign it, and I'm going to give it to Charlie to be delivered to the table.

HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT

Mr. Steve Clark: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas pedestrians and cyclists are increasingly using secondary provincial highways to support healthy lifestyles and expand active transportation;

"Whereas paved shoulders on highways enhance public safety for all highway users, expand tourism opportunities and support good health;

"Whereas paved shoulders help to reduce the maintenance cost of repairs to highway surfaces; and

"Whereas the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka's private member's bill provides for a minimum one-metre paved shoulder for the benefit of pedestrians, cyclists and motorists;

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the private member's bill which requires a minimum one-metre paved shoulder on designated provincially owned highways, receive swift passage through the legislative process."

I'm pleased to affix my signature and send it to the table with page Luisa.

WORKPLACE INSURANCE

Mr. Bill Walker: "A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, Bill 119:

"Whereas beginning 1 January 2013 WSIB was expanded to include groups of employers and principals who had previously been exempt from WSIB and had private insurance; and

"Whereas this new financial burden does nothing to improve worker safety and only drives up the cost of doing business in Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To repeal the statutory obligations created by Bill 119."

I agree with this petition, I will affix my signature and send it with Jenna to the Clerks' desk.

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: I have a petition here to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas residents of Ontario want a moratorium on all further industrial wind turbine development until an independent third party health and environmental study has been completed; and

"Whereas people in Ontario living within close proximity to industrial wind turbines have reported negative health effects, we need to study the physical, social, economic and environmental impacts of industrial wind turbines; and the Auditor General confirmed wind farms were created in haste and with no planning;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

1600

"That the Ontario government place a moratorium on the approval of any wind energy projects and a moratorium on the construction of industrial wind projects until further studies on the potential adverse health effects of industrial wind turbines, their effect on the environment, the potential devaluation of residential property are completed; and that any industrial wind projects not currently connected to the grid be cancelled."

I agree with this petition, and I affix my name to it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Petitions? Last call for petitions.

Seeing none, orders of the day.

Orders of the day. Someone is asleep at the switch.

Mr. Phil McNeely: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. The Great Lakes Protection Act.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): You can't do it. It has to be a minister.

Hon. David Orazietti: Government order G6.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GREAT LAKES PROTECTION ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR LA PROTECTION DES GRANDS LACS

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 5, 2013, on the motion for second reading of Bill 6, An Act to protect and restore the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin / Projet de loi 6, Loi visant la protection et le rétablissement du bassin des Grands Lacs et du fleuve Saint-Laurent.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Northumberland–Quinte West. You have four minutes left, I believe.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: It's a pleasure to continue debate on Bill 6, the Great Lakes Protection Act, 2013, put forward by the member from St. Catharines.

As mentioned yesterday, Mr. Speaker, one of the concerns we have, and that we're seeing repetitively, over and over, from this Liberal government, is the creation of new bureaucracies to administer and oversee these proposed superficial bills being brought forward.

There is already in existence, as I pointed out yesterday, Ontario water legislation, such as the Clean Water Act, the Environmental Protection Act, the Nutrient Management Act, the Safe Drinking Water Act, the Water Opportunities and Water Conservation Act and the Ontario Water Resources Act, which may all be in conflict with the proposed legislation under Bill 6.

Here we have another example of a long line of Liberal regulatory duplication, overlap and conflict. We see this over and over again. This is a movie that my esteemed colleague from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound says he can barely make it through once, let alone watch the same movie over and over again.

Mr. Bill Walker: Groundhog Day.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Groundhog Day is a great example of what this Liberal government is doing.

As I pointed out, water power and water conservation are obviously near and dear to my heart, coming from the great riding of Northumberland-Quinte West where we are blessed with an abundance of water—the Trent-Severn which is a fantastic tourist attraction.

I would encourage all members here and their families and individuals back in their ridings to come down to Northumberland-Quinte West and traverse the Trent-Severn and come and do some fishing.

Mr. John Yakabuski: See the big toonie.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Absolutely.

So again, though, we do have a vested interest in the conservation of water and what water actually does, not only for our local economies but for the economies of the province in general.

The Liberals can say, and they can dress it up with window dressing as fancy as they please—their intent in bringing this legislation forward in the vested interest, but again, this is duplication upon duplication. We have some serious concerns with another layer of bureaucracy, much like the LHINs that were brought in to look after health care at a cost of \$360 million a year. That's \$360 million that can go directly into front-line health care.

What is this actually going to do? What is it going to cost? As I alluded to yesterday when I was discussing the bill, there's no financial cost that has been accounted for in this bill. So, what is it actually going to cost the province—the taxpayers of this province who are already overburdened with red tape and debt and trying to find a job? There are 600,000 Ontarians who woke up this morning and didn't have a job because this government has burdened them with over-regulation, with bureaucracy. So what is this going to actually accomplish, Mr. Speaker? That's the thing we have to ask ourselves.

I want to thank you very much for allowing me to talk about this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Vanthof: Once again, it's an honour to rise in this House and make some remarks on Bill 6, the Great Lakes Protection Act and make some comments regarding the comments of the member from Northumberland-Quinte West.

I don't think anyone in this House doesn't want to protect the Great Lakes or doesn't want to protect water. I think we can all agree on that. I think where our disagreement is coming from is whether we're actually doing that or whether we're just talking about doing that.

One of the things that concerns us about this act is—and hopefully we can fix it, as and if it goes to committee—although there is mention of accountability in the strategy, there's no mention of accountability in the act. When you introduce legislation, when you pass legislation, as we have learned in our careers here, whether they be short or long, accountability isn't actually something—although we assume it's part of the parcel, it has proven not to be, and in this act, once again, there's no mention of accountability.

If we're going to be here passing legislation, it's very important that both the legislation and the bodies that are created by this legislation, whether they be guardian councils or boards or independent corporations, whether we call them by numbers or colours, or names that aren't quite colours, like Ornge—you know, it's not quite a colour, but once again, it was something created, and it wasn't accountable. Once again, with this act, it sounds good.

I believe the opposition have some very valid concerns—not all we agree with, but I think, for one thing, there is a lack of accountability. The strategy says we want to talk about accountability, but the act itself doesn't, and that's a very big problem and something that has to be addressed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Phil McNeely: I'm pleased to respond to the debate. One of the important things we're doing with the bill is to go forward on the Great Lakes goals of engaging and empowering communities. I think the minister announced eligibility for the program, that it's under the Great Lakes Guardian Community Fund. This morning he mentioned that \$1.5 million in funding was available to communities, conservation authorities, organizations, and it's very important, engaging and empowering the communities so that the awareness is there. That's important.

Protection of water for human and ecological health: We know the major expenditure in water treatment and sewage systems that has been going on in our cities, but we have that 6% growth around the Great Lakes, and that's always difficult to handle.

Improving wetlands, beaches and coastal areas: The wetlands are so important in cleaning the water, so that's one of the things that will be coming out of these community and conservation authority efforts.

Protecting habitats and species: We know that each year there are additional species that are listed as endangered in this province, and so that's important, and we have groups across the Great Lakes. I saw a great program last night of people who were putting up the platforms for the nests for birds. I think it was on Lake Erie.

Enhancing and understanding adaptation, because we have to adapt. We're not doing much about controlling emissions, so we have to adapt.

This is a great piece of legislation that's going to get that awareness out there and help Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jack MacLaren: This is a piece of legislation that we are very suspicious of. I'm disappointed that the Liberal government would go so far as to create this piece of legislation, which is a duplication of legislation that already solves all of these problems, addresses all of the problems they are concerned about.

We have the Conservation Authorities Act, the Planning Act, a host of clean water acts, the Environmental Protection Act, the Nutrient Management Act, the Safe Drinking Water Act, Water Opportunities Act and the water resources act, not to mention the international bodies that already address how to take care of the Great Lakes: the International Joint Commission, the Great Lakes Water Quality Board, the Great Lakes Executive Committee, the management committee of the Canada-Ontario agreement—all of which implement the priorities outlined in the US-Canada Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement. If that isn't enough legislation to look after land that belongs to somebody else, I don't know what is.

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I see no mention in this legislation to consider private property rights, and I'm very suspicious that, like some of the other green legislation that we have in this province, more land use designations will be placed on private property without any consideration for the person who owns the land. In the public interest, it will be another taking of land from private property owners in Ontario up and down the Great Lakes and the Ottawa Valley.

I see the groups in here that are mentioned are environmental groups, so it makes me suspicious of what the Liberals are doing. Is this a political agenda to try to gain support to survive, and it's an endangered government, like the Endangered Species Act might support?

Mr. Speaker, this is an absolutely unnecessary, redundant piece of legislation that the PC Party is totally opposed to. This must not pass. This would be a crime against the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to rise to give a brief comment on Bill 6, the Great Lakes Protection Act.

I think we have to be honest about the state of the lakes. There's growing concern, not just from people who are private owners along the lakes, but businesses that understand that having clean lakes, having lakes that are actually part of the broader economy—they need to be protected. The record on ensuring that some environmental protection standards are upheld is not a good record.

From our perspective, we welcome the conversation—"conversation" is the word of the month, I have to say.

We have to have some strategic conversations about the Great Lakes. But we also need to be very clear: If this piece of legislation gets to committee, New Democrats are going to be focused on some concrete funding levels that are specific, that are public, that are transparent. We're going to be honest about the concrete targets that need to be part of the plan going forward, because without targets, you can't measure your success, and we need to be able to measure the success.

Certainly, there's a need for greater clarity. There are communities across this province that rely on the Great Lakes. There are future generations that are depending on us to do the responsible thing, to make sure that this legislation actually follows through on the goals that many of us share. Moving forward, when this does get to committee, we will be vigilant in that regard.

I look forward to listening to the speakers today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Northumberland–Quinte West has two minutes.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: I think that there have been some very good points made here from, obviously, our caucus. The member from Kitchener–Conestoga, our critic on the environment, has done an exemplary job of pointing out some of the major concerns that we have here moving forward, as has the member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills, who touched on duplication and, again, the short-sightedness that this Liberal government has had these many years that they've been in power.

It's interesting to note, Mr. Speaker, that the new Premier has said that she is looking to change and work together with the opposition. But what we're seeing is the same old government; it's the deck that has just been shuffled. Sure, it's a new face as Premier, but again, one of the things we learned—and how we learn is through repetition. We learn from our mistakes. But apparently, this government hasn't learned from their past mistakes. They keep taking us down the wrong path.

Bill 6 is just another example of how this province has been run into the ground with joblessness and strapping future generations with a heavy burden of debt. I can't stress enough, Mr. Speaker, when we spend \$10 billion a year annually on interest alone on our provincial debt, that's \$10 billion that can go into so many more great things like front-line health care at Trenton Memorial Hospital or education.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Ms. Cindy Forster: I'm pleased to rise to talk a bit about the Great Lakes Protection Act, which is really kind of a framework bill. It purports to protect and restore the ecological health of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River basin and to create opportunities for individuals and communities to become involved in protection, restoration and the ecological health of the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence basin.

I want to thank the Minister of the Environment for bringing this bill back so quickly. It was Bill 100 that had come forward sometime in October last year. Since the House resumed on February 19, a couple of weeks have

passed, and I think it's important to move this forward and have some discussion on it. I also want to thank the member—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Conversation.

Ms. Cindy Forster: No, “conversation” is not one of my words.

I want to thank Jonah Schein, our member from Davenport, who did his one-hour lead on this yesterday. He's our critic for the environment and for urban transportation. I think he hit a lot of very important points about the strengths and the weaknesses and the challenges in this bill.

Unfortunately, the Liberal government prorogued this Legislature for a period of just over four months. There were many bills, Speaker, more than 100 bills, that we debated and discussed in our last two sessions. Those were very important bills for the people who live in this province. They were discarded by this Liberal government when they made the decision to prorogue.

That prorogation was really all about trying to get a majority government. It was all about the Kitchener-Waterloo by-election. Unfortunately, they didn't win because the win is actually beside me today. It's sad that in fact a government would prorogue for those purposes—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Political purposes.

Ms. Cindy Forster: —for political purposes, for political gain, and really put all of the business of the Legislature on the back burner.

There were a number of NDP bills that would have made life more affordable for Ontarians, would have improved the quality of life for Ontarians. One of them was even supported by our PC friends here sitting beside us, removing the HST from the home heating bills. That would have actually given Ontarians \$100 or \$200 back on their heating bill. They could have used it for daycare, they could have used it for their kids' sports, or they could have used it for going out and having a little fun in their lives, right? Or maybe they would have used it for groceries; a lot of them are hard-pressed to make ends meet at the end of the month.

Or the member from Hamilton Mountain's bill on Ombudsman oversight for family and children's services, to enhance and protect the lives of children and rebuild relationships within family units: That was what that bill was all about. But unfortunately, the government failed to bring that forward, so now we are going to be back here debating that bill once again, along with 97 others.

Or, Speaker, there's your bill, as the member for Hamilton East-Stoney Creek, on retrofitting retirement homes with sprinkler systems. That was a very important bill for seniors in this province. But unfortunately, because of prorogation, that also didn't get dealt with. Hopefully, that bill will be coming forward again this session so that we can move forward on that important safety issue for seniors in this province.

These are the kinds of bills that get results for Ontarians. These are the reasons why prolonged prorogation

for partisan politics negatively impacts the people who live in this province, the taxpayers of this province.

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In my own riding of Welland, 20,000 people signed a petition over the spring, fall and winter of this year. That petition was to stop the transfers. I talked about it—I actually read it into the record today, my petition—but it's a move by the Liberal government to try and offset a \$13-million deficit by consolidating services from south Niagara to a new north Niagara hospital that's about to open in March. It means that the southern part of the Niagara Peninsula will not have equal or fair access to care for women and children, maternal programs, pediatrics and women's surgery.

I spent much of May, June and July doing town hall meetings and a survey in my riding. The Minister of Health said that she wanted to listen to the people of my riding and to the people of south Niagara before she made a decision, but, unfortunately, the House was prorogued, so we never, ever were able to have that discussion. She wasn't able to listen to them. She has never been down to Welland—to my riding—to listen to the people of Welland and what they want in their health services.

Cutting hospital budgets in Niagara and in the province to fund home care is the goal, and our party believes that, instead of doing that, we should actually be cutting CEO salaries.

Ms. Soo Wong: What does it have to do with the bill?

Ms. Cindy Forster: It has a lot to do with the bill, because—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Point of order, the member from Richmond Hill.

Hon. Reza Moridi: Mr. Speaker, would you ask the speaker to talk about the bill rather than about health issues?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): If the member would try to keep to the parameters of the bill and try not to wander too much. We'll keep an eye on it to see that you are staying within the guidelines. Thanks.

Ms. Cindy Forster: This bill, the Great Lakes Protection Act, is very important to my riding and to the Niagara region because of where we are geographically located: the Welland Canal, which is part of the St. Lawrence Seaway system, a channel of canals and locks that move ocean-going ships from the Atlantic Ocean through the Great Lakes. We sit right around Lake Erie and Lake Ontario, and the Great Lakes are actually located in four of the five municipalities in my riding.

The fourth Welland Canal is now the Welland Recreational Canal. I think it was back in the late 1960s that they actually rerouted the Welland Canal, which ran directly through my city, into a rural part of my community. The recreational canal is now used for recreational activities; it's used for rowing, kayaking and triathlons, and it will be one of the home sites to the Pan Am Games in 2015 and an international rowing competition this summer.

The bill is important to the rural part of my riding as well, the township of Wainfleet. Wainfleet: A great part

of it is along the Lake Erie shoreline, and there have been a lot of sewer/septic issues in recent years which have impacted the integrity of Lake Erie. Part of that problem was planning processes back in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s that actually allowed people to build numerous cottages on small parcels of land. Over the years when I sat on regional councils and when I was actually the mayor of my city, the issue of Wainfleet and boil-waters on a fairly regular basis along the shoreline—

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Now they're dealing with turbines.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Yes, they are. Now they're dealing with turbines, and the integrity of the beaches as well. There are many days in the southern part of Niagara that people can't use our beaches because of the number of impacts to the water.

We called it the "Big Pipe" issue. There was a plan to actually try and develop a sewer treatment facility and sewer lines throughout the shoreline of Wainfleet and into Port Colborne. Wainfleet was opposed to it for two reasons.

They like the tranquil, relaxing atmosphere of their township. They were concerned that if the sewer lines were actually installed, and the sewage treatment plant, that there would be a lot of major development along the shoreline. So in, I think it was, the 2010 election, they actually passed a motion not to continue to participate in that project. The cost was going to be prohibitive as well. At that time I think it was \$60 million, and there was no funding forthcoming from the federal government or the provincial government during those discussions. So they opted out.

They now have kind of a find-and-fix program. They have inspections of their septic systems, and when they're found to be deficient, the homeowners are actually required to go in and fix them.

While I was mayor of Welland and on regional council, I also had the opportunity to attend a number of meetings around Great Lakes issues. There is a group called the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative; they have annual meetings. It's a bi-national group of mayors and local officials who actively work with federal and provincial governments in both the United States and Canada to advance the protection and restoration of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River.

Brian McMullan, the mayor of St. Catharines—St. Catharines is part of my riding; I actually share it with the Minister of the Environment—was actually the chair of that committee for 2011-12, and they produced many really good recommendations for action to protect these channels of waterways and the Great Lakes. One of those recommendations is actually the bill that was tabled by the Minister of the Environment. I understand, having read a number of regional reports over the last couple of days, that the region of Niagara was involved and has had really good consultation on the bill as well.

Now, in my riding, of course, because there is the Welland Canal, which stretches for many miles, there are a lot of bridges in Welland, Thorold, Port Colborne and

Port Robinson, and there's a need for sustainable infrastructure money from the federal and provincial governments, because we have so many bridges to maintain or replace.

At the Ontario Good Roads Association and ROMA conference two weeks ago, I heard from many mayors from small municipalities with similar bridge issues who cannot even afford to take advantage of the funding program—the one-third split between the feds and the province—because the cost to maintain or repair these bridges is just prohibitive. It's so expensive to do those repairs.

I'll give you the example in my riding of the Main Street bridge in Welland, the city in which I live. We had an estimate—this was probably two years ago. It was going to cost \$10 million just to scrape the paint off and repaint it—a lot of that because of the toxicity in the paints they used years ago. The need to do that restoration really makes it prohibitive for small municipalities to do any of this stuff.

We heard from them that they need help. In fact, some of them suggested that we need to have a different formula for funding bridges and roads and those kinds of things in their communities. They can't afford to do the work. It's another download from the provincial and federal governments to cash-strapped municipalities and their taxpayers.

There are many other environmental issues that need attention, in addition to this Great Lakes bill. My riding and other ridings across this province historically were heavy in manufacturing, and they're often left with cleanup costs or forced to let properties sit idle because of heavy industrial contamination. In my riding, and I know elsewhere in this province, there have been tens of thousands of jobs lost in this sector. Companies have closed their doors, corporations have walked away, or they leave the property sitting. They take down as many buildings as they can possibly so that they pay the least amount of taxes to the municipalities. So now, in addition to people losing their jobs, they're often left with those cleanup costs as well.

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Examples of those were the John Deere Welland Works: 1,000 plus. These are people who got grants from the provincial and federal governments to the tune of \$10 million to put a new paint shop in.

Henniges: 1,500 workers, at its peak. They close their doors, they walk away, and we're left with the cleanup. There are many environmental issues that need to be dealt with, and as I said, this is only one of them.

In Port Colborne, residents launched a class action suit against Vale. It was upheld to the tune of I think \$36 million for 7,000 residents in Port Colborne, but it was overturned at the Supreme Court, and Vale was off the hook.

Along our shoreline, we have a number of conservation areas. We have Long Beach conservation park and Morgan's Point conservation area. These areas are impacted, particularly in the summer, with E. coli and

other issues. Some of these campgrounds have even had to close because they just don't have the money to actually fix their septic systems.

In summary, I just want to talk a little bit about the bill and some of our concerns.

I think our biggest concern is that this is a framework bill but it's missing those five Ws—who, what, where, when and why—and how much is it going to cost, and how are the committees going to be established, and how are the people going to be appointed to this council?

The threats to the Great Lakes, though, are immediate and pressing. I think that although people will embrace this kind of legislative framework for the Great Lakes, they want to see real action and change. This bill has to have some more meat to it.

I look forward to the bill getting into committee and, hopefully, we can make some amendments to it and actually put some teeth into it to make it work for the people who live in this province.

There are other actions that we need to look at as well, like a declaration that safe drinking water and sanitation are basic human rights of all people living around the St. Lawrence basin; and a process for citizens and communities living on the St. Lawrence basin to sue corporations and governments who knowingly are polluting local water sources, for violation of the human right to clean water.

I think we also need to declare that water and waste water services are public services, to be equitably and affordably provided by governments. I can tell you, when I was on regional council, there was a move to lease out our water and waste water systems to foreign investors so that they could get a tax writeoff. I don't think that that's somewhere we want to go, unless we want to perhaps have things happen like happened in Walkerton.

Ms. Catherine Fife: And there's no accountability.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Yes, there's no accountability.

There are some other issues about consultation with First Nations. We often hear in the House, on any number of issues, that First Nations haven't been consulted. Many of these channels and waterways, they have treaty rights to, so I think it's very important to be consulting with our First Nation chiefs and making sure that they're onside and that they're part of the councils that will be participating as we put the meat to this bill.

The Great Lakes provide drinking water for 80% of Ontarians. In my riding, our water actually comes from the Welland Canal, which is a very important part of the St. Lawrence Seaway system. People in my community and across this province are concerned about our water quality and a lack of enough infrastructure dollars to upgrade sewer systems and water systems in municipalities all across this province.

I look forward to some more discussion in committee. I thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity to be part of this debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Phil McNeely: I'm pleased to be able to respond to the debate we've just heard.

The purpose of the act is, I think, to explain some of the questions that were raised: to protect and restore the ecological health of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River basin and to create the opportunities for individuals and communities to become involved in the protection and restoration of the ecological health of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River basin. It's acknowledged that there are a lot of difficulties, a lot of problems, and so this is needed.

Contacting the individuals and getting them involved, the communities around—I was surprised, as I said in the follow-up to the minister's speech the other day, that Ottawa and Orléans are included in this. This is great, because we have a significant problem in Orléans with pollution of one of the beautiful beaches, Petrie Island, and it's because of the old combined sewers in the city of Ottawa. When there's a major storm, you get the sewage flushed into the river, and our beaches are closed. So that is a big problem.

What the Great Lakes Guardians Council—I hope we have a member on it from the Ottawa area. I'll have to look into that and get some—Ecology Ottawa is very much involved in that.

“—identify priorities for actions to achieve the purpose of the act”—that's what the Great Lakes Guardians Council will be doing;

“—identify, in respect of projects to achieve the purposes of this act, potential funding measures and partnerships;

“—facilitate information sharing to achieve the purposes of this act; and

“—give the Minister of the Environment an opportunity to obtain input from individuals participating in meetings of the council through discussion of any matters relating to the purposes of this act,” and to establish the targets.

I think it's very important. This act is needed, and this community involvement is needed, if we're going to be able to get the public pressure that's needed to make our Great Lakes even better.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Again, I'm pleased to stand and address Bill 6 this afternoon.

Speaker, what I can say is this: more boards, more duplication, more red tape. The government's proposal under Bill 6 to create a third regulator for Ontario's shorelines is yet another classic example of Liberal regulatory duplication, overlap and conflict.

The Conservation Authorities Act already gives the Ministry of Natural Resources the power to regulate shorelines for watershed management. The Planning Act gives municipalities the authority to prohibit development on shorelines. And now the Minister of the Environment wants in on the action, along with the power to collect fees for violations.

There's also the potential that regulations made under Bill 6 could conflict with Ontario's existing water legis-

lation, including the Clean Water Act, for one; the Environmental Protection Act, two; the Nutrient Management Act, three; let's talk about the Safe Drinking Water Act, four; and, of course, the Water Opportunities Act and the Ontario Water Resources Act, five and six. It just goes on and on.

Bill 6 is, in fact, open-ended. It has no specifics, and leaves all decision-making and priority-setting to the environment minister and yet another unaccountable board—yes, the guardians' council.

The irony of Bill 6 is that the Liberals claim they need new legal tools to deal with emerging new priorities.

In closing, Speaker, I'd like to say this: We cannot and we will not support this bill. As the wallet-watchers of Ontario taxpayers—this bill only creates greater bureaucracy and means greater costs. This government is facing a \$12-billion deficit. Let's stop the spending madness now.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's once again an honour to rise and speak on Bill 6 and comment on my esteemed colleague from Welland, who has much more experience with the Great Lakes than I ever will, having the Great Lakes in her riding and being a past mayor of Welland. I think she brings a very good perspective to this debate today.

In my last two minutes, I talked about how, in this act, there isn't really accountability. It mentions accountability in the strategy, but it doesn't mention accountability in the act.

While we hope, on this side, in this corner of the House, that this is a true attempt to improve the Great Lakes, there are some questions. Because although the opposition call themselves wallet-watchers and we have our debates—part of the problem with this bill is there's no real money attached.

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Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: But if there's no real money attached to a bill, then is it really a bill that has a real purpose, or is it just feel-good legislation, which we here sincerely hope it isn't? I think others in this House believe that it certainly is; we hope it isn't. But the fact that there's no money attached—because even in these times of fiscal restraint, if you're going to propose legislation—if you propose something, there's always a cost. To propose something without including the cost—from my business background, that's just not a direction that we're going to go.

You can't propose something open-ended. If I went to my bank and said, "Well, this is an overarching loan. There's no real purpose for this loan," I wouldn't get very far, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Hon. Reza Moridi: It's a great pleasure to rise in this House and to speak to Bill 6, the Great Lakes Protection Act.

As someone who has grown up in another continent, thousands and thousands of kilometres away from Toronto—studying geography in my elementary school, I was very much impressed by the majesty of the Great Lakes, even as a small child.

The lakes are vitally important to our lives in Ontario and everywhere where people live around these Great Lakes. Just as an example, 80% of our drinking water comes from the Great Lakes. Some 95% of agricultural land in Ontario is in the Great Lakes basin. Our climate is heavily dependent upon the Great Lakes. And, of course, the Great Lakes is one of the major shipping routes in a major industrialized area of the world. The area around the Great Lakes is one of the major industrial areas of the world.

Mr. Speaker, the scientists tell us that the Great Lakes are in decline, so it is our duty as government to protect the Great Lakes for us and for our future generations. That's why we have brought forward Bill 6, the Great Lakes Protection Act.

This act establishes a Great Lakes Guardians Council. It also proposes—it requires, actually, the minister to maintain Ontario's Great Lakes Strategy, the first Ontario road map which lays out provincial priorities in order to protect the Great Lakes for us and for future generations.

It also enables the minister to set Great Lakes science-based targets. Whatever happens in the Great Lakes has to be done based on the scientific findings. That's why this bill proposes Great Lakes science-based targets.

That's why I fully support this bill, and I hope everyone in this House supports this bill as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Welland has two minutes to respond.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Thank you to the members from the government and from the official opposition and from my own party for their comments.

You know, this is a very interesting bill. It has some strengths, but it's only a framework. It has a lot of weaknesses. I think one of the biggest weaknesses is probably the targets and perhaps some costing of what that's going to look like.

We know, when we talk about homelessness and housing targets, that in fact over a 10-year period, although the Liberal government had a target of I think 10,000 units—and that would have been in a four-year period—it has only reached 16,000 units, plus maybe 1,000 that they talked about today, in a 10-year period. So if you don't have targets, it's hard to actually meet the goals of what the bill is intended for, right?

There's no kind of discussion in the bill—I talked a bit about Wainfleet and beach pollution and E. coli in our water and all of those kinds of things. It really does fail to address causes of pollution and discharges, and conservation groups have certainly said that the bill needs to be strengthened about the pollutants that are allowed to be discharged into our lakes and to find ways to actually eliminate toxic substances in our Great Lakes and in the St. Lawrence River basin.

There's lots of work to be done on this bill, and our party certainly looks forward to having that debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. Before we move to the next speaker, I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 98(c), a change has been made to the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business, such that Ms. Thompson assumes ballot item number 18 and Mr. Nicholls assumes ballot item number 44.

Further debate?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to join the debate today on Bill 6, the Great Lakes Protection Act. I listened carefully to some of the previous speakers. It sounds like there's some support and some opposition to the bill. Some people seem to feel the bill could be improved upon through the committee process, and as I said yesterday, I think that is a valid point and that's what the committee process is for.

I come from a community that was built on the shores of Lake Ontario. People started arriving there to found the town of Oakville in the late 1700s and the 1800s. The community that I live in is Bronte, which is a part of Oakville. For the past 28 years, I've lived in the same neighbourhood. I can see the Great Lakes from my house. If I look down the street a little bit, 50 or 75 yards, I'm looking at Lake Ontario. I live in a community that was founded on the shores of Sixteen Mile Creek and Twelve Mile Creek, and it was founded for a very specific reason, and that is that at that point in time the Great Lakes were seen as a method of transportation; it was a good way to move goods.

The founder of Oakville, George Chisholm, used to be in the lumber business. He would float the logs down Sixteen Mile Creek to the harbour that he founded in Oakville and then they'd be shipped off, sometimes all over the world, to supply the needs of lumber around the world; and from those humble beginnings and industrial beginnings the town of Oakville grew.

The town of Oakville has actually grown into a pretty good community over the years. Lumber is not a big industry in Oakville anymore, obviously, but the harbours still play a huge role in the fabric of our society and the fabric of our community in Oakville. We have two harbours in Oakville, Oakville harbour and Bronte harbour. Boating is a huge tourism attraction and also just part of the lifestyle. People like to move close to the lake. They like to sail; they like to own boats. When we watch the Olympics every four years, and we share the pride of all Canadians when we come home with a gold medal or somebody comes home with a silver or a bronze medal, a lot of that we'll see from the Burloak Canoe Club. Burloak Canoe Club is right in the harbour in Oakville and is responsible, I think, for a lot of the sports achievements that we've been able to achieve. When you think of people like the Oldershaws and people like Adam van Koeverden and others who have really done this country proud in sports, we forget that those people were able to practise those sports and develop themselves, become the athletes they are because they lived in

proximity to water. They lived in proximity to a place where they could go and they could practise their sculling, their rowing or their canoeing.

Also, Oakville has some industrial components to it, and that is in the west end of town, where I live. There used to be a number of oil refineries there. At one point, during the OPEC problems, crude oil was shipped into the refinery. It came down the St. Lawrence River. It came from places like Venezuela, came into the refinery and was turned into the products we use in our cars. We use jet fuel, things like that. Nowadays, there's still a pier attached. It's only a terminal now. There's no refining that takes place in the community, but we still have an industrial pier in Oakville that is used by the Great Lakes shipping traffic on a pretty regular basis.

I've lived in this area for 28 years now. I see the people who are attracted to this amenity. I know how they feel about the Great Lakes. I think, by and large, people feel that all three political parties that we've had in Ontario in government over the past years could have done a better job of protecting this asset. I think we all need to own up to that. I think we all need to admit that. I think it's self-evident.

1650

I live close to Lake Ontario, as I said. We're not very far from the shores of Lake Ontario right now as we sit. That used to be a lake you could eat the fish from. That used to be a lake you wouldn't be afraid for your kids to go and swim in. I live not very far from Bronte Beach. Bronte Beach used to be a place where kids would go and run in and out of Lake Ontario. You wouldn't want that happening these days, unfortunately. The lake oftentimes is posted as being unfit to swim in. And the fish—the Star had a salmon derby there. I'm not sure how much of the fish you would want to eat from Lake Ontario these days. Things, I think by anybody's measurement, have deteriorated over the years. I think we simply could do a better job of that.

About 10 or 15 years ago, perhaps, we started to have a problem with algae in Lake Ontario. We started to see that algae blooms were forming in the lake. When the winds changed the right way, the algae would wash ashore and would stay on shore. It would start to decompose, and it would start to impact pretty heavily on the lifestyle that people were enjoying in the area because it simply smelled horrible. People couldn't stand it.

I was on regional council at the time. Because of the impact on my community, we set up a committee called the algae action committee. We found out that the province of Ontario at that time—I think that would have been under the Conservative government—didn't know a whole lot about what was happening in Lake Ontario, simply really didn't have an answer as to what it was going to do about the algae problem. When we had things like Walkerton happening, for example, we started to realize we needed to do something within our own community because we couldn't look to the higher levels of government to assist us in this.

So we set out on our own, basically. A number of interested citizens, a lot of citizens with scientific back-

grounds from a number of disciplines, sat on the committee and started to do a lot of research on the issue. They came up with some solutions, actually. They came up with some solutions like harvesting, came up with some like changing the design of shoreline protection so it didn't trap the algae when it washed ashore.

What we were starting to find out also was that the zebra mussels had clarified the water in the nearshore of Lake Ontario to the point that sunlight was penetrating to places it would never penetrate to in the past. What that was starting to do was, obviously, provide the sunlight that is necessary for the algae to bloom. We also found that, despite the best intentions of previous governments to limit the amount of phosphorus going into Lake Ontario, despite the fact that we had moved to either low- or non-phosphate detergents, phosphorus was still getting into the lake. We were still seeing that there was a lot of runoff coming off, sometimes from the urban areas during storm incidents and sometimes from the agricultural communities that bordered on the creeks.

We were able to get all people working together on this issue. I have to say that, despite some reservations at the start that a local community could have any sort of impact on a problem that was this big, we actually made a lot of progress over the years. I'm very, very proud of the work of the citizens on this committee.

We also realized in Lake Ontario—some scientists describe it as having two lakes; you've got the nearshore and you've got the middle of the lake. In the nearshore, sometimes the currents are going the opposite way to the way you think they should be going. We all assume that the Great Lakes are flowing north to south or from west to east. There are places in Oakville, certainly, where the current actually goes from east to west. This is something that we hadn't taken into account as lay people, primarily. We realized there was a lot we had to learn, but we also realized that we needed some tools to assist us in this.

You don't have to live right on the shores of Lake Ontario. There's a number of members whose ridings would border any one of the Great Lakes in the chamber; they're represented by all three parties.

I look at a town like Milton, for example, just to the north of us. Milton was a community that had the same sort of rich history as Oakville. Over the years, due to its proximity to the region of Peel, to the city of Mississauga, to the city of Hamilton and to the city of Toronto, Oakville grew. It started to develop, and as it grew, it was able to go to lake-based resources to provide the drinking water that people needed to survive, basically.

Milton didn't have that same advantage, unfortunately, at the time. Milton was on a well-based system. Those systems had a defined capacity and a limited capacity, which meant that the ability of the town of Milton to grow to that level that it wanted to grow to was constrained simply because of a lack of water.

There was a huge debate in the region of Halton at the time as to whether we should extend the Big Pipe from the shores of Lake Ontario up to the town of Milton.

After much deliberation, it was decided that would be a good idea. We were able to put some expense parameters around it so that the costs were shared by the right people. But what that has allowed us to do is to use that asset that we have down there, one of the Great Lakes, Lake Ontario, to bring that drinking water and that processed water and the water for whatever use the people in the town of Milton have for it—to be able to bring that up out of the lake into the town of Milton. Milton, from time to time, is noted as being one of the fastest-growing communities in the world and certainly in all of North America.

I'm just illustrating the value and the necessity of water as one of those primary things that, first, allows us to live—you can't live without water—but allows us to do some of the things that make up the lifestyle that we enjoy in the province of Ontario, from recreational uses to industrial uses to just being able to rely on clean drinking water in your house.

Now, I referred to the algae action committee that was active in the region of Halton as an example of a local group of citizens that had a concern and wanted to do something about it, that went to all three levels of government and didn't really receive the support they expected to receive. They expected their governments to act much more proactively in the obvious protection of an asset that was so important to the economy of a province like Ontario and a country like Canada, and had to kind of set out on their own. But it shows that a group of local citizens are able to stimulate change by working in a local community and by just bringing a determined attitude to the table.

What this piece of legislation calls for is the establishment of what's known as the Great Lakes Guardians Council, which allows groups such as the algae action committee—and I am sure there are others around the province of Ontario—to have a forum to bring those ideas forward, to collaborate with other groups, to learn from each other and to establish a list of priorities if we are going to deal with something as large an issue as the Great Lakes, which are known around the world and which I think are deserving of protection.

Interjection.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Now, obviously others in the House don't believe that the lakes should be protected. They think everything is in place, that it can be done: "We've got the legislation in place. We don't need more legislation. Don't worry; be happy. Everything will be good. The water will clean itself up." I just don't think that's the approach that the people of Ontario are looking to.

We know that three of the four lakes are in decline. I don't think that is unique to any political philosophy; that's simply the scientific facts today, that the lakes are in decline, and we need to do more than we are doing today to ensure that the lakes turn around and become the sort of lakes—kids should be able to swim in Lake Ontario. We should be able to eat the fish from Lake Ontario and simply—

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: We do. Come on down to Quinte West-Cobourg.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I think I'm going to invite this member over to my house. I'll bring him some fish, and I would love to see him eat them. Perhaps, Speaker, you could bring some from Hamilton harbour. We could have a fish fry. That would be something to see, Speaker, and I think that would be worth the price of admission.

But certainly I think we need to approach this in a strategic manner. I understand the member is trying to say that there is a sports fishery and there is a commercial fishery still present in the Great Lakes. I agree with that. I want to see that flourish. I'm not sure it is flourishing today; I would think that it's under some stress today. If that sports fishery or commercial fishery is going to have a future, we need to do better than we've been able to do with the Great Lakes in the past. It's that simple.

1700
There's nobody who likes to go down to Port Dover and have some perch more than me. I like being in Port Dover—it's a wonderful community—and I like being able to eat something that's been caught by a local fisher. It's something that I think Ontarians would like to do more of. The fact of the matter is, in my community the fish that are being caught by people are not something you would want to eat. It's that simple. I'd like to have the same sport fishery and the same commercial fishery as the gentleman across the way.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: You have to move to Northumberland—Quinte West.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: He wants me to go to his community and eat fish, Speaker. I'd love to be able to invite him to come back to my place and eat fish, but he simply can't.

There definitely need to be some science-based targets put in place on this. When you look at the Great Lakes basin, it's simply too important, too large a natural asset, too valuable a natural asset to ignore the way, perhaps, we have in the past. It's a huge economic engine, a huge economic driver for this area.

In the Great Lakes basin, there are approximately 56 million jobs that are at stake. Some people would think, "Oh, that's small potatoes." I don't. A lot of people rely on the Great Lakes basin. A lot of people in other parts of the country rely on what comes out of the Great Lakes basin in terms of output. When you look at the planet, 20% of the fresh water on this planet is contained right on our doorstep. Instead of protecting that asset, instead of ensuring that that supply goes on into the future, what I think all three levels of government have done is neglect their duty. I simply think it's too important a global resource for us to take that approach much into the future.

They tell me—I don't know how they figured this out—it takes 300 years for a drop of water to make its way through the system. They say it takes 300 years for a drop of water that starts off, I'm assuming, in Lake Superior to make its way to the St. Lawrence River. When you start to think of it in those terms, you start to

think of the responsibility that's placed upon us as legislators to ensure that that resource is protected and that we're not just protecting it for ourselves, as much as we like to use it—we like to swim in it, we like to boat on it, we like to ensure that manufactured goods and natural resources are moved on it, from a shipping perspective. It's also something we've inherited from the people who came before us, and I think it behooves all of us as legislators to think we're going to pass that asset on in better shape than we received it.

To be honest, Speaker, it's fairly evident that what we've done is allowed the deterioration of this asset. The idea behind the Great Lakes Protection Act is simply that other groups, other governments in the past with the best of intentions—the Conservatives, the NDP and the Liberal Party—have brought forward pieces of legislation along the way, realizing that there's an asset out there that needs to be protected, and at that point in time, they thought this was the appropriate thing to do.

I think that most of us in this House, anyway, would agree that maybe all the answers aren't in this act—I'm sure there will be other acts in the future that will speak to water quality in the province of Ontario—but that at this given point in time, this is a good step forward. Perhaps the third party is saying some changes may be necessary along the way at the committee stage, or should at least be discussed, that would make this a better act than it is today, and I certainly have no problem with that.

But what we're aiming to do is try to do our part as a generation to restore the ecological integrity of something we've taken for granted for far too long. There are other parts of the world you can be born in that simply don't have this type of resource, that would actually—I don't want to use the word "kill" for this resource, but certainly are very envious of what we have here. Yet we just treat it as the lake at the bottom of the street.

For some reason, we used to decide we would put our garbage dumps close to rivers so they would flow into Lake Ontario. I can go to the town of Oakville, and the old dump is right on the banks of the creek, and that's not unique. It was quite common to a number of communities that often we treated the Great Lakes as a place where we could throw our waste, where we could dump stuff, that somehow it would go away. Who knows where it went to, but as long as it went away, that was okay.

I think that short-sighted approach is something we've learned over the years is simply not good enough, that what we need to do is we need to take stewardship of these Great Lakes. We need to work with our American partners. We need to work with our interprovincial partners as well. We need to ensure that the asset that we inherited from the people who came before us is one that we're going to pass on to generations that come after us.

That, I think, is the hallmark of a good piece of legislation that makes something better. I think it's something that we should all be proud of supporting in this House. Those members who are going to support this, I thank you for that; those who aren't, it's shameful.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: It's a pleasure for me to rise and comment on what was said by the member from Oakville.

I was raised about five or six miles inshore from Lake Erie near a little town called Kingsville. In fact, as an aside, I took swimming lessons in Lake Erie at Leamington and I was taught by a future Miss Canada. It certainly wasn't my swimming ability that helped her along; however, she—

Interjection.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: This is quite a while ago, but women have played a big part in my life, and she certainly was one of them.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: You'll be celebrating women's day on March 8.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I'll be celebrating that.

Anyways, just a little aside for you, Speaker, about where I came from and what I did. That was in Lake Erie.

The lake has gone up and down in cleanliness over the years. In fact, I can remember stepping over fish just to get to the water, and that certainly has cleaned up quite a bit. There's quite a fishery in the lakes—a good fishery in the lakes—right now.

The worrisome part about this bill is it's open-ended. It has no specifics and leaves all decision-making and priority-setting to the environment minister and another unaccountable board, the Guardians' Council, which gives me pause.

There are no dollars affixed to this bill. We don't know what it's going to cost—another scary thought when dealing with this current government. They have wasted so much money on Ornge, gas plants, whatever, that it's a scary thought there's no price tag on this thing. I think we should all be concerned about that.

The GFI: In electrical terms, that would be a ground fault interrupter—that's the thing you can plug your radio into when you're sitting in the bathtub and not get shocked. They give it another name; they're calling it a geographically-focused initiative. Unfortunately, they've got another acronym here which is going to cost us a lot of money—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Mantha: It's a privilege to get up to speak to Bill 6, the Great Lakes Protection Act. I heard some of the comments that the member for Oakville mentioned. I too have keen interest not only in one of the lakes but in all of them, two of which actually border Algoma-Manitoulin—great fish in all of those two lakes which I eat very regularly.

As a matter of fact, I would invite you to a couple of the fish derbies in Algoma-Manitoulin. There is one in Wawa which has a wonderful salmon derby in the summertime, and in the wintertime they have the wonderful lake trout. On Manitoulin Island there's a few of them as well. You're all invited to have some good tasty fish in Algoma-Manitoulin.

Who would disagree with this type of a bill? It says, "to protect and restore the ecological health of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River basin; and ... to create opportunities for individuals and communities to become involved in the protection and restoration of the ecological health of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River basin." Who is going to disagree with that?

Encore une autre fois, on voit un extrêmement beau projet de loi où on va avoir des belles nouvelles et ça va être extrêmement beau, mais on est encore en train de développer un plan pour avoir un plan pour développer une action. C'est de l'action dont on a besoin immédiatement avec les lacs; ce n'est pas de regarder à faire un nouveau comité pour implémenter quoi que—ça devrait être fait automatiquement, en fait. Il faudrait qu'on regarde à vraiment prendre une action, apporter une résolution, et non seulement regarder à prendre un endroit—en général, il faudrait qu'on regarde à tous les lacs et puis qu'on prenne des actions immédiatement.

Là, quand je parle en français, mes amis, vous êtes bien tranquilles, mais c'est ce qu'il faut vraiment faire immédiatement, tout de suite, et puis qu'on prenne de l'action concrète pour résoudre le problème des Grands Lacs.

Merci beaucoup, monsieur le Président.

1710

Le Président suppléant (M. Paul Miller): Merci beaucoup.

The member for Scarborough Southwest.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I was going to speak for two minutes, but I thought maybe the House leader was going to stand up on a point of order.

Hon. John Milloy: No, no.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: Okay. I appreciate that.

My riding of Scarborough Southwest's entire southern border is on Lake Ontario, and in the riding of Scarborough Southwest, at the very southwest end, there is Toronto's major water plant, which actually brings in water from Lake Ontario. It's a two-mile-long tunnel which was built in the 1930s, and this water is brought in. I've had a tour of this amazing facility which was built in the 1930s, and back then, they had the foresight to build it large enough to be able to sustain almost all of present-day Toronto. Now, we have a plant at both the east and west of us, but this one is by far the largest one, and I've been in it.

The importance of water and protecting water cannot be overstated. This bill is also very important. I've been hearing parts of the debate, and this act works on making sure that we preserve these lakes, not for our generation and the future generation, but for many, many generations to come, when we're long gone from this planet and other people are on the planet here living their lives. It's the foresight, doing something beforehand, like what was done before, which makes a difference.

I know the member from Oakville spoke about this and how important the lake is and that it was also used for transportation, for many reasons. It's still being used for transportation. I went to law school in Windsor and saw those huge barges pass by, just along the Detroit

River, either heading towards Thunder Bay or the other way.

So it's important to support the bill, and thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak for two minutes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jack MacLaren: Mr. Speaker, this bill is a duplication, it's redundant, and that's been said many times. We are almost repeating ourselves. Because of all the other legislations that look after the water and look after the shorelines and look after the land, there is no need for this bill. Everything is protected and looked after by all the other green legislations that are out there doing supposedly doing their job—and I would question a lot of those.

So then one would wonder, what would be the interest, the initiative or the reason for this bill to be created?

There's a group of people called the Great Lakes alliance, which is six NGO environmental groups whose idea it was to draft this up and present it to the Liberal government and ask them to try to create a bill. We've become very suspicious of their motives as landowners and their lack of consideration of the rights of landowners.

Landowners have an inalienable property right to their land. That can't be taken away without respect for that right. If it's in the public interest to place a designation on land to supposedly protect something which is already protected, then the public should pay. There should be full, fair and timely compensation incorporated into this bill if it's to go ahead and restrictions are to be placed on private land that's in the public interest.

It's also disrespectful of private property owners that they're not regarded as stewards of their land, as responsible people, which most of them are. It's in nobody's interest to hurt the environment, to hurt the water, because we leave that, as stewards of the land, for our children and the rest of society. That's missing too—not only the value of the land but the respect for people and their inalienable rights for property rights.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Oakville has two minutes.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity to reply, and thanks to the members from Perth–Wellington, Carleton–Mississippi Mills, Scarborough Southwest and Algoma–Manitoulin for their comments about this very, very important issue.

I would tell the member from Algoma–Manitoulin that I have been at a fish fry in his riding, and I enjoyed it very much. I have toured much of his riding by snowmobile. Certainly those members who are rightfully proud of the sports fishery that they have in their own ridings I'm sure would like to see that extended to other portions of the Great Lakes and would like to see other members in this House be able to stand and say exactly the same thing.

The fact of the matter is, I can't. I think anybody with a riding in Toronto—the member from Scarborough

Southwest—simply couldn't stand up and say the same thing. Perhaps you can go out and catch the fish, but you wouldn't want to put them anywhere near your plate. So, certainly we need to work towards those ends.

Somebody was asking, "Well, what are the priorities? What do we have to do? What do we have to fix?" One member was suggesting, "Don't worry. Everything's okay. We've got everything we need." But the fact of the matter remains that we're dealing with excessive phosphorus loadings in our lake that we need to do something about. The wildlife habitat is on the decline as well, especially our wetlands. We've got invasive species. The zebra mussels are still with us, causing a lot of damage. The Asian carp: I don't think we've seen that peak yet to the point and the potential for the damage that it could do to the ecosystem here. And we're seeing our lake levels certainly in the Great Lakes—anybody who lives around Georgian Bay, anybody who maybe has another property in Georgian Bay can see the impact of lake levels on the ecosystems in those areas.

Certainly climate change is with us and is having a huge impact on the Great Lakes. My suggestion is that we support this and allow it to go forward to the committee process if any improvements or amendments are needed along the way, but to suggest that this isn't necessary I think is just hiding your head in the sand.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. Further debate?

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm pleased to stand today to speak about Bill 6, the Great Lakes Protection Act, as it is called, on behalf of the PC caucus.

Last week, I had a chance to listen to the MPP from Kitchener–Conestoga, the PC environmental critic, do his leadoff speech, and I want to commend him for all the work he has done on this issue. We have an informal Great Lakes caucus, and during ROMA last week as well, my colleague hosted a round-table meeting with MPPs and municipal leaders who bring Great Lakes issues to the forefront with us. He's just taken an outstanding leadership role on this issue. Again, I'd like to commend him, and I appreciate all the work he has done.

But when I reflect upon the Great Lakes Protection Act, I have to reflect on the fact that I am very proud to come from the amazing riding of Huron–Bruce. The entire west coast is lined by the beautiful waters of Lake Huron. That's why my riding is known as Ontario's west coast.

Growing up, I've been very, very fortunate to share with you that when my siblings and I participated in exchanges, we would travel to Goderich and Bayfield and we'd always take the exchange students to these towns and ports because we were very proud of the industry they represented and the tourism and just the scenic value that our beaches offered. We were always very proud of that, but sadly, the lakes have evolved, water levels have dropped and things are changing on the fly.

I'm also proud to share with you that growing up, I had family members who owned cottages along Bruce

Beach just south of Kincardine. Honestly, there's no better place in this province to be to watch the sunsets and see the lakers cross that horizon as they carry their cargo from Goderich to Owen Sound to Sault Ste. Marie, and the industry that that represents cannot be taken lightly. We need to address that, which I will further in my comments.

Lastly, as I introduce why I'm really interested in speaking to the Great Lakes Protection Act—I'm also very proud to say that I grew up on a farm, and I don't think there are any better people in this province than farmers who act as stewards of the land. When I think about this, I can't help but think of my 4-H beef club leader—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Could I ask the photographer to do something about the clicking—if he could take individual shots, please? It's very distracting. Thank you.

Go ahead.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was just referencing the fact that farmers are some of the best stewards in this province, and we take the ownership and responsibility of our lands and waters very, very seriously. I can't help but reflect on Murray and Wilma Scott—Murray was my 4-H beef club leader—and the work that they have done on their farms to be good stewards and to improve water quality. It just proves how people can lead by example. Unfortunately, the efforts that have gone into Bill 6, the Great Lakes Protection Act, simply do not lead by example because there are so many organizations, so many alliances and so much regulation that have gone before it. That's what I want to talk about because, getting to the crux of this bill and what it means to Ontario shorelines, I have a number of concerns.

1720

The first concern I have is the common theme within this government. Over the last couple of weeks, we've heard this Liberal government go on about how they've overachieved. The reality is just this: They're over—they're over-regulators. It really has to come to an end.

You can ask any stakeholder, farmer or small business owner what the toughest hurdle they face day to day is, and they would tell you that it is the government regulating them to death. We are adding regulations to things that are already regulated, creating yet another layer of bureaucracy that people of the province have said loud and clear they don't want.

The proposal under Bill 6 will create a third—yes, a third—regulator for Ontario shorelines. That means more overlap, more duplication and more bodies to conflict with each other instead of working on what matters most: the viability and the sustainability of one of our most precious resources, the Great Lakes.

It's interesting when we talk about this over-regulation and overlap and potential conflict. I want to revisit the issue at hand. The government's proposal under Bill 6 to create this third regulator is yet another classic example of Liberal regulatory duplication, overlap and conflict.

As has been mentioned before, we have the Conservation Authorities Act, and we have the Planning Act. Now the Ministry of the Environment wants in on the action along with additional powers to collect fees for violations.

We've also heard over this debate that Bill 6 would conflict with Ontario's existing water legislation, including the Clean Water Act, Environmental Protection Act, Nutrient Management Act, Safe Drinking Water Act, Water Opportunities Act and the Ontario Water Resources Act. This is just ridiculous, and we have to rein it in because, honestly, too many rules will just lead to confusion and insufficient action on the resource that we need to value most.

I also would like to draw attention to the fact that, in addition to those acts, we have bodies that are in place already. We don't need this guardians' council, for goodness' sake. As my colleague from Kitchener-Conegosta mentioned last week, we have the Great Lakes alliance. We also have the United States and Canada in an agreement whereby they signed the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement in 1972.

That begs the point that the honourable member from Halton made just earlier today in talking about the Canada-Russia summit from 1972. I'd be remiss if I didn't say, when we reflect on the year 1972, that when this government was prorogued, Paul Henderson received the Order of Canada for the outstanding performance he had in that 1972 summit, yet he's still not in the Hockey Hall of Fame. I hope someday we see that corrected.

But I digress because I'm talking about an amazing champion, and we have to pull back to the issue at hand: Bill 6 and the champions that are already in place doing their job. As I mentioned before, there's a lot of redundancy that this Bill 6 introduces. In terms of champions, there's already an organization called the Great Lakes water initiative. I have people, municipal leaders, who are champions about this cause already working collaboratively with the lake shore states and provinces in Canada. Deb Shewfelt from Goderich and Mitch Twolan from Huron-Kinloss are doing a great job. We do not—I repeat, do not—need another layer of bureaucracy confusing the issue with the establishment of the guardians' council. Bill 6 is redundant—simply.

But another concern I have is that Bill 6 has striking similarities to another Liberal bill that was passed in 2009, a bill that I have come to know quite well. Anybody hazard to take a guess? It's the Green Energy Act. The Green Energy Act is similar in that Bill 6, just like the Green Energy Act, is very open-ended. We have heard about this. It has no specifics, and it leaves many things to regulation, and to another unelected, unaccountable board—in this case, the so-called guardians' council—that we don't need. As I mentioned before, we already have in place champions representing us very well in that regard.

Like the Green Energy Act, I fear important decisions regarding our shorelines will be left to regulation behind the closed doors of cabinet. We saw what happened behind the closed prorogation doors. So many regulations

and approvals were made without proper oversight and accountability through this House. In terms of what happens behind closed doors, I'd like to share an example whereby setbacks with the Green Energy Act were left to cabinet instead of being debated in this House and at committee—totally unacceptable.

I have to agree with and support my colleague from Kitchener-Conestoga when he asked, "Why did this bill have to be rushed through?" The Great Lakes had not been mentioned in the throne speech whatsoever. Typically, the throne speech sets the government's agenda for the upcoming session. The Great Lakes Protection Act wasn't mentioned, but then I dare say that agriculture and food—other priorities that should be at the top of the Liberal agenda—weren't really mentioned either. I agree with the member from Kitchener-Conestoga that we need to be focusing on priorities that matter to Ontarians: focusing on jobs, getting our economy turned around and ensuring that ratepayers here in Ontario have affordable, reliable energy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I would ask the member from Huron-Bruce to stick to the bill. She's wandering again. Thank you.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Very good, Mr. Speaker. With that said, I have to share with you that—you know what?—in the last three weeks, this government has had ample opportunity to table meaningful legislation to turn this province around. But no, they haven't chosen to do that—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I don't believe the member got my message. Last warning: Stick to the script. Thank you.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'll stick to the script. Yes, sir. There are so many examples of how this government has missed priorities. But you know what? Unfortunately, one of their priorities is not talking about what makes sense. Instead, this government is choosing to add additional red tape and regulation. It's an absolute shame.

The Great Lakes play a major role in providing drinking water, shipping routes, recreational activities, swimming, fishing and boating. We've heard all the examples through this debate. Even spending a simple day on the beach, something I know many of us like to do, is going to be threatened with all this over-regulation.

I will agree that the Great Lakes and the preservation of them are very, very important. As we've heard our members say in this debate, it's an important source of drinking water for millions of Canadians, and it's also important to our agricultural and transportation sectors. In fact, if I look back to Hansard last week, our member from Kitchener-Conestoga shared some very great examples that I'd like to revisit.

"The Great Lakes also support 25% of Canada's agricultural capacity," which is incredibly important, recognizing the importance of this sector, even though it wasn't really mentioned in the throne speech. Some 45% of Canada's industrial capacity is recognized through the Great Lakes, and \$12 billion is injected into Ontario's tourism industry annually. The Great Lakes have such an

amazing impact throughout a variety of sectors. "Every year, more than 160 million metric tonnes of raw materials for manufacturing products and agricultural commodities are moved on the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Seaway." There are so many things that are important with regard to our Great Lakes. We have to be careful that we don't handcuff our industries and overburden them with regulations that we do not need.

When we talk about burdens and issues associated with unnecessary regulation, I have to share with you that this past weekend I met up with a constituent. He was concerned about the future of the province. Specifically, he told me that he couldn't sleep at night, and he was going to do something he had never done before. David Keith from Teeswater wanted to write the Premier. I encouraged him to do so. I see it as part of my job as MPP for Huron-Bruce to make sure that my voices from Huron-Bruce are heard.

I just want to share a little piece from the letter that he wrote the Premier and I delivered to her on Monday. His letter read like this: "Please let your cabinet know of a great deal of growing frustration in rural Ontario regarding the dictatorship of the previous Liberal government.

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"The Clean Water Act will require many farms within 'capture zones' of municipal wells to completely change their methods of farming at considerable cost, maintain a record of everything they do, and suffer severe devaluation of their property without any compensation.

"Because of laws passed in Toronto, municipalities all over rural Ontario have been denied the right to protect the health of their own and those families within the communities....

"Unresolved frustration leads to anger, and an angry community leads to revolution."

This gentleman is 82 years old. He closes by saying, "We were hoping to live out our years, the few that remain, in a quiet and peaceful rural area, but every new law passed in Toronto takes away the rights of rural residents to protect themselves and their property and makes that dream less likely."

He's reflecting on the Clean Water Act, which already does recognize how we have to manage our valuable resources that ultimately stem from the Great Lakes. We don't need more bureaucracy clouding the issue.

I'd also like to draw attention to the fact that the Bruce County Federation of Agriculture also had concerns about the draft source water protection rules, specifically for the municipality of South Bruce and the Brockton area. The federation president, John Gillespie, went on to say that the Bruce County Federation of Agriculture feels that the nitrate issue in that area is being made out to be a bigger issue than what it really is.

As I said before, farmers are proud stewards of the land, and over-regulation is a costly burden that no one wants. This is unfortunately exactly what Bill 6 represents.

In my riding of Huron-Bruce, people are also concerned about invasive species along the shoreline. In

particular, phragmites have become a really huge concern. For those of you who don't know, phragmites are a perennial grass that has caused severe damage to wetlands and beaches in Ontario for several decades. In 2005, it was identified as the nation's worst invasive plant species by researchers at Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

The Great Lakes are home to 130 endangered species. We also can't turn a blind eye to the issue associated with Asian carp. We could go on and on about the threats that face our Great Lakes system. Local municipalities are passing resolutions to try and make a difference.

What we need, Speaker, is action. We don't need more bureaucracy; we don't need more regulation. We need to be enabling our folks to do the job they want to do on behalf of the people who enjoy the lakes and recognize success through their industries.

I have so much that could be said with regard to the redundancy of Bill 6 and how another layer of unnecessary regulation and the introduction of another unneeded board or agency could just play havoc with what we need to be accomplishing.

A real issue that should be addressed, which interferes with and is a concern to our tourism industry as well as our industries that use the lakes for transportation and the moving of manufacturing raw materials and commodities, is the water level. It was interesting; a couple of weeks ago I had the honour of attending the Huron County Federation of Agriculture MP and MPP day. Agricultural organizations during that meeting warned that water levels are going to be down approximately two feet this year over last year. This is going to wreak havoc on beach communities like Bayfield, Goderich, Kincardine and Port Elgin. It's going to wreak havoc for tourism and for the marinas.

Do you know, actually, during our meeting, during the ROMA convention, which my colleague from Kitchener-Conestoga hosted, there was a very real concern, as well as frustration, that was expressed with regard to how a blind eye and deaf ear are being turned to the concerns of marinas? Marinas have a very short window to get ready to open up for the season. They've been seeking dredging applications. Our honourable member from Simcoe is concerned that some of his marinas may not even get open, because the real issues are not being addressed. That's why Bill 6 is so redundant and unnecessary. We're not addressing the issues that really need to be addressed and that are priorities for our constituents and our business people.

As I wrap up, Speaker, I'm very concerned that this bill will continue to place layers of red tape in front of those doing good work along the shorelines. The Great Lakes governance framework between the US and Canada, and, in turn, the co-operation between the federal and provincial governments that has been in place and has worked for more than 40 years, is going to be ignored. Why, after a decade in power, do the Liberals suddenly believe that Ontario needs more legislation to protect the Great Lakes? It just doesn't make any sense whatsoever.

Bill 6 gives public bodies, including municipalities and conservation authorities, the token—token—role of requesting a new regulatory area. But the real power, unfortunately, ultimately will rest with cabinet. It just is not acceptable.

And what about the so-called guardians' council? I want to revisit that for a second. A big concern that we have is, how much will this cost? No one seems to know the answer to this. And when does this government plan on releasing this information? The astute member from Timiskaming—Cochrane mentioned just moments ago that when you propose something, there is usually always a cost associated with it. Unfortunately, the way this Liberal government has operated causes me to worry. We could think about the Green Energy Act; we could think about the cancelled gas plants. Everything they do has cost the Ontario taxpayer dollars and more strain and burden on their shoulders. Speaker, this is unacceptable. We just can't support this additional Bill 6.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments? The member from Timiskaming—Cochrane.

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you, Speaker. It's once again a pleasure to stand here and speak on Bill 6, following my esteemed colleague from Huron—Bruce. I detected in your voice, Mr. Speaker, that you didn't agree with her comments regarding me.

Anyway, as we've already covered here, there are a few things—no one does not want to protect water in Ontario; no one does not want to protect the Great Lakes. We've already covered that this act doesn't have any accountability—yes, in the strategy, but not in the act. There's no cost with the act.

One thing I think is really missing is that we do have many acts that cover water, and there's nothing I see in this act that actually looks for the redundancy, looks to see if this is actually working. This is an overarching piece, an idea piece, but it's not a piece that's actually going to—or it could, but we don't see it in here. Right now, we don't see where this is actually, after it's passed, if it's passed, going to improve the Great Lakes.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Is it going to do anything?

Mr. John Vanthof: We haven't seen it. It looks almost like a feel-good piece.

I had a short meeting with the new Minister of Rural Affairs. I said that one of the things that really bothers people in the country—a shout-out to farmers; I'm proud to be one. What really bothers people in the country is that there doesn't seem to be a relationship between the level of risk and the level of regulation. People on the ground in the country want to fix, want to protect, but they want practical solutions, not just fuzzy rules from up on high. So far, from this—maybe we'll see more in committee, but so far that's all we have seen with Bill 6.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments? The member from Ajax—Pickering.

Mr. Joe Dickson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to be having the opportunity to speak while you are in the chair, sir.

It's quite interesting; I hear a number of comments, and I should mention that I do have in full support here the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of the Environment, from Ottawa-Orléans. He's talking to me about the Ottawa River, and I hear other people, some of my good colleagues across the aisle, talking about various things, talking about Manitoulin Island. I've done that tour, the aggregate tour on the school bus. You can sure lose 10 pounds off your derrière on those runs, once you've looked at 18 or 19 quarries.

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I can tell you also that I was very pleased to hear in the past few days that the member from Davenport was very much in support of the act as it is coming forward.

I also listened to a concern in Simcoe about dredging. I think we had several delegations in that area, particularly at our recent convention across the road. We at MNR were listening to all of these concerns. Of course, what they forgot to say is, part of the land there is First Nations, so you have another entity as we try to resolve the situation. But you're right: That should be done.

I happen to live on the Great Lakes—not quite physically on the Great Lakes, but in the town of Ajax adjacent to the Ajax waterfront. It is just a gorgeous area. I've had the pleasure of being the chair of the Ajax waterfront for 15 years. I commenced a number of other environmental groups in Ajax and Pickering. I can tell you, there is a lot of meat and potatoes here.

Mr. Speaker, I'm out of time, but I'll come back and talk while you're here again, sir.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Chatham-Kent-Essex.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Thank you very much, Speaker. Again, I want to compliment my colleague from Huron-Bruce and her wonderful, powerful presentation as to why our Progressive Conservative colleagues will not be supporting this particular bill.

Interjection.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I know; it's heartbreaking.

You're absolutely right: Water levels are down, and we're concerned about the effects that that will have on our beaches and of course also on tourism and so on.

Do you know, the wonderful riding of Chatham-Kent-Essex actually embraces the north shore of Lake Erie? But this Great Lakes Protection Act, Bill 6, which was introduced by the honourable member from—where is he from?

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Renfrew, your member is speaking. I can't hear him.

Interjection.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Thank you—the Minister of the Environment. I appreciate him bringing this forward. But again, as has been pointed out, there's a lot of duplication, and what we don't need is an additional regulatory group. There has been no mention of costs involved with this regulatory group. We believe that a lot of the en-

vironmental groups that are already doing their job are doing it well. There's no need to add yet another regulator.

I look at this—we're all concerned about having clear, clean, crystal water. We all want this, not only for the present but also for the future—for future generations to come. Again, I totally respect the Minister of the Environment, for one of the reasons because of his tenure here but also the fact that I worked with him, and he with me, on the major fish kill in Lake Erie that occurred back on Labour Day weekend. Again, I thank him for that, but we won't be standing in support.

I see my time is up. Thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Ms. Catherine Fife: This is an important piece of legislation. We have some concerns. Our critic Jonah Schein—those concerns are well documented. But if you've ever jumped in one of the Great Lakes; if you've ever had the pleasure—I know that many of you have told people to jump in a lake—

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's cold, but a cold, clean, Ontario lake: That's something to fight for. That's something to try to preserve. That's something to try to protect, I think, actually, that we have good evidence that the regulations and the legislation that are in place are not working. In fact, in a recent Toronto Star article, it was found that two out of 21 samples they collected—research collected—contained 600,000 plastic pieces per square kilometre—these are micropieces of plastic—nearly twice as much as the highest plastic count ever recorded in the infamous Great Pacific Garbage Patch. The researchers were surprised by this. They were surprised because, first of all, the levels of plastics in ocean bodies are well documented, but in our lakes—this is actually even more concerning for us. It should be concerning for you. It should be concerning for the government.

I think that there is a genuine question at play here. The integrity of our lakes is definitely in question. You only have personal experience, if you're cottagers, if you have a boat on a marina—these are the day-to-day concerns of people across the province of Ontario.

This is what we also know: The Ministry of Natural Resources doesn't have the resources to protect the lakes, so we need to put something in place. We're committed to making this work. We're committed to staying focused on the fact that regulation and legislation should work, and that's where our energy is going to go.

We disagree with the premise that it's not needed; something is needed. We're committed to making this work.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Huron-Bruce has two minutes.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'd like to share my appreciation with our member from Timiskaming-Cochrane—it's always a pleasure to give a shout-out to the farmers standing alongside you in that regard.

To our member from Ajax—Pickering: It's interesting how you remembered to reference food, the meat and potatoes, but the fact of the matter is, over-regulation is choking the people who are really trying to make a difference, and we have to bring it to a stop. That's what Ontarians are asking for.

To my colleague from Chatham—Kent—Essex: I couldn't agree with you any more. You're very well spoken and you eloquently caught the issues at hand associated with Bill 6.

To the member from Kitchener—Waterloo: I liked your analogy of telling people to go jump in the lake. That's rather interesting. We all have to enjoy that cold, fresh water.

But the realities are, Mr. Speaker, as I wrap up—I can't help but continue to express my concern that this bill will do nothing but place layers and layers of red tape and burden on the backs of the people who are trying to make Ontario work: the small business owners, the farmers, stakeholders, the tourist sector, the transportation sector, the agricultural sector. We could go on and on and on.

The reality is, we're facing a very tough wall here because, unfortunately, this Liberal government continues with a we-know-best attitude and they're continuing to make decisions without local consultation.

I look forward to listening to the rest of the debate on this issue, but the Great Lakes Protection Act does nothing but add another body we don't need and regulation we cannot afford.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to ask for your indulgence a little bit because I'm going to start by talking about my dog, but I will tie the discussion of my dog in with G6, the Great Lakes Protection Act. And bear witness, you will see how this happens.

First of all, my dog's name is Victoria. She is an English bull terrier. For those who know the breed, I've mentioned Don Cherry because he has one, too. Also of course, Babe: Pig in the City—a bull terrier there; The Incredible Journey—another bull terrier. They're short-haired dogs. In fact, they have been compared by people who don't appreciate their true beauty as being somewhat pig-like. Their bellies are very pink and almost hairless—very cute, incredibly cute. She's 80 pounds, but she's cute.

She goes to the lake. Lake Ontario is right at the foot of my riding. I take her down there and she loves to race up and down the beach and chase the waves. It's an easy walk for an owner because I don't have to walk her, she walks herself. She gets exercise. We're all good; we go home. She goes for a little swim, and we go back. She developed a rash, Mr. Speaker, a very bad one, a very obvious one. I took her to my veterinarian—and this is how it all ties in, you see? He said, categorically, "Do not let your dog swim in Lake Ontario."

Now, if that's not a criticism of the state of our Great Lakes—"Don't let your dog"—never mind your—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I'd like to remind the member that we don't have cross-dialogue; we're going through the chair. If you wanted to have a nice little discussion between the three of you after you're finished, you can go outside and talk. Thanks.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: So, my veterinarian said, "Don't let your dog or any dog swim in Lake Ontario." There's no more eloquent statement about the state of our lakes than that. Not even a dog can swim in Lake Ontario. In fact, I was told by a neighbour that if you put undeveloped film in Lake Ontario, it will develop. There's that level of chemicals in some aspects of this beautiful Great Lake. It should be beautiful and it should be clean. So that's how I tied in the dog.

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What are we doing here? What are we doing with this piece of legislation? For those who are listening and watching and wondering what we are talking about, let me talk about what this bill actually says. It's actually almost laughable. Here's what it does. It establishes a Great Lakes Guardians Council, made up of the Minister of the Environment, other ministers and key stakeholders. It does that. So it's going to set up a council—that's number one.

Number two, it's going to require the minister to maintain and update Ontario's Great Lakes Strategy—already done. They have to keep that up. It's going to allow—notice the language here—it's going to allow the minister to set qualitative or quantitative targets; and it's going to allow—not require—allow the minister to request the development and implementation of initiatives. That's what it's doing. This bill isn't going to do anything. This bill is going to do absolutely nothing concrete—

Interjection.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's not going to clear up my dog's rash.

It's not going to do anything to protect our water. There is absolutely nothing concrete in this act that will affect the quality of water in the Great Lakes basin whatsoever.

The question truly is, why table it? We've seen bills like this come forward before around environmental issues because—you know, I understand that the government wants to be seen as being environmentally friendly. I get that. But there's a term for this kind of bill; it's called greenwashing, because that's what it does. It makes it look like you're doing something to protect the environment when actually you're not. Right? It's greenwashing, pure and simple.

I also listened to some of the comments around the floor about the cost that's not here. It's not written in; it's not anywhere. Presumably these folk who are getting together on this tribunal are travelling from somewhere. Are there costs associated? Are there per diems? No costs attached whatsoever, no standards, no targets, nothing; there's nothing concrete.

It reminds me. We've all had the pleasure of having an audience with Gord Miller, our Environmental Commis-

sioner here, and it's always a pleasure. Every year he brings out a report—and every year is more critical than the last—of what the government isn't doing in terms of protecting our environment, lakes included.

One story that he brought forward that really resonated with me—and I've used it many, many times—is, he said that part of the problem, of course, is not only do we not do anything to protect the environment but we don't have enough enforcement officers to even put in place and act on the regulations that we have. He said there's protected property, of course, in Ontario—property you are not supposed to be able to build on or touch, kept pristine. He said that finally they had the resources to send an inspector up to this property, and they found a landing strip built there—a landing strip. Somebody was building an airport on protected property. Why didn't they know that? Because they don't have the resources in his department to even enforce the regulations that are already in place. Guess what? This is a government that cut back his department and his funding. I wonder why. He turns out critical report after critical report.

Is it good that First Nations are involved in being one of the stakeholders here? Yes, because Lord knows we have seen legislation come forward where that's not the case. So that's a good thing, but, you know, again, we're dealing with a crisis situation. If you ever want to spend a depressing evening, have a glass of wine with an environmentalist, because they will tell you what's really going on. They will tell you how desperate the situation is for our planet and for our environment, for our water, for our soil. It's desperate.

We have the great joy of the member of Timiskaming—Cochrane, our first farmer in this caucus since I've been elected, and he will tell you—it's a famous rock song—we're paving over paradise, we're paving over our farmland, we're polluting our drinking water, we're polluting our environment.

This is the government, Mr. Speaker, that was going to close the coal-firing plants. Remember that? First it was in 2007 that they were going to be closed, then it was in 2011 that they were going to be closed. Guess what? Some seven years later I stand here, now it's in 2014—in 2014 they're going to be closed. Meanwhile, we're the only party, the New Democrats, who are actually standing up and saying no to huge amounts of money being spent on nuclear, which would suck up all the money that would go to things like conservation and other environmental necessities.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Last warning to the member from Northumberland—Quinte West.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I have very few minutes.

Talking about the nuclear issue, though, there's something very distressing that's happening with the Great

Lakes,, and that is that Ontario's nuclear power stations are using once-through cooling systems, which allow the plants to suck in and spew out hundreds of millions of litres of water a day. Now, that should scare people. It scares me. Nothing in this bill will address that.

So we have a bill that sets up a council to talk about strategies and what to do to save the Great Lakes, but there are no targets, there are no requirements—no requirements whatsoever, really—in this bill to do anything about it.

Will New Democrats vote for this so it can go to committee? Absolutely. Why, might our friends to the right ask, why are we supporting it? We're supporting it so we can get it to committee so that we can give it some teeth, so that we can put into this bill, that has a framework, barely—and actually turn it into a piece of legislation that might actually save a litre of our water, because water, Mr. Speaker, is a huge issue. The Council of Canadians—it makes me think of them and their incredible work on water.

Interjection.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Yes, Maude Barlow—I mean, this is a huge topic that this bill does not address in any way, shape or form. So by voting for it, by giving it assent, we push it forward to committee, where, I hope, everyone here will actually, with this framework, build a house on it, build something on it that will actually protect something.

But it's sad because we see so many bills like this. Look how long it takes in this chamber to discuss this, to do anything with it. We could be discussing something with real teeth. Taxpayers should be very aware of all of the hours of talk and debate that go into a bill that really accomplishes nothing whatsoever. That's sad, because that's wasting money already—that's their money.

I'm just going to conclude. We're running out of time. I want to get home to my dog, the one that doesn't swim in the lake.

Interjection: You can go for a skate tonight.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: There we go.

Interjection.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Her name is Victoria, yes. I want to get home to Victoria.

Hopefully when it gets to committee, we can actually add something that will turn this into a real piece of legislation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you to the member. When the debate continues on this bill, the member will have the floor.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It is now 6 o'clock or close to it. This House stands adjourned until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1758.

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MacCharles, Hon. / L'hon. Tracy (LIB)	Pickering-Scarborough East / Pickering-Scarborough-Est	
MacLaren, Jack (PC) MacLeod, Lisa (PC) Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Carleton-Mississippi Mills Nepean-Carleton Mississauga-Brampton South / Mississauga-Brampton-Sud	
Mantha, Michael (NDP) Marchese, Rosario (NDP) Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	Algoma-Manitoulin Trinity-Spadina London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Mauro, Bill (LIB) McDonell, Jim (PC) McGuinty, Dalton (LIB) McKenna, Jane (PC) McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Thunder Bay-Atikokan Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud Burlington Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Westdale	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires
McNaughton, Monte (PC) McNeely, Phil (LIB) Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Lambton-Kent-Middlesex Ottawa-Orléans Ottawa-Vanier	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre délégué aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC) Miller, Paul (NDP)	Parry Sound-Muskoka Hamilton East-Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est-Stoney Creek	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Milligan, Rob E. (PC) Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Northumberland-Quinte West Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Moridi, Hon. / L'hon. Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	Minister of Research and Innovation / Ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation
Munro, Julia (PC)	York-Simcoe	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Murray, Hon. / L'hon. Glen R. (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Naqvi, Hon. / L'hon. Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
Natshak, Taras (NDP)	Essex	
Nicholls, Rick (PC)	Chatham-Kent-Essex	
O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	
Orazietti, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth-Wellington	
Piruzza, Hon. / L'hon. Teresa (LIB)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse
Prue, Michael (NDP)	Beaches-East York	
Qaadir, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Sandals, Hon. / L'hon. Liz (LIB)	Guelph	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Schein, Jonah (NDP)	Davenport	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock	
Sergio, Hon. / L'hon. Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	Minister Responsible for Seniors / Ministre délégué aux Affaires des personnes âgées Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Thornhill	
Singh, Jagmeet (NDP)	Bramalea-Gore-Malton	
Smith, Todd (PC)	Prince Edward-Hastings	
Sousa, Hon. / L'hon. Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto-Danforth	
Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga-Erindale	Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / Président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement Minister of Government Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thompson, Lisa M. (PC)	Huron-Bruce	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming-Cochrane	
Walker, Bill (PC)	Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound	
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe-Grey	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Wong, Soo (LIB)	Scarborough-Agincourt	
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Agriculture and Food / Ministre de l'Agriculture et de l'Alimentation Premier / Première ministre Leader, Government / Chef du gouvernement Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke	
Yurek, Jeff (PC)	Elgin-Middlesex-London	
Zimmer, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Willowdale	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Vacant	London West / London-Ouest	
Vacant	Windsor-Tecumseh	

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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Taras Natyshak
Grant Crack, Kim Craitor
Vic Dhillon, Michael Harris
Rob Leone, Bill Mauro
Taras Natyshak, Taras Natyshak
Rick Nicholls, Michael Prue
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**Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs /
Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques**

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Victor Fedeli, Catherine Fife
Kevin Daniel Flynn, Monte McNaughton
Michael Prue, Peter Shurman
Soo Wong
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Mike Colle, Rosario Marchese
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Phil McNeely, Norm Miller
Jerry J. Ouellette, Shafiq Qaadri
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Margarett R. Best, Vic Dhillon
Joe Dickson, Randy Hillier
Rod Jackson, Monte Kwinter
Peter Tabuns, John Vanthof
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Ernie Hardeman, Helena Jaczek
Amrit Mangat, Michael Mantha
Jane McKenna
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